

OF SWEET GRAPES, WHEAT BERRIES AND SIMPLE MEETING:

Feminist Theology, Gestalt Therapy,
Pastoral Counseling, and The Earth

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the

School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 1990

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to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of
Theology at Claremont in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of*

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ABSTRACT

Of Sweet Grapes, Wheat Berries and Simple Meeting:

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This dissertation is concerned with the ways dualistic conceptual frameworks and hierarchies of value in psychology, philosophy, and theology have contributed to human suffering and environmental degradation. The mutually reinforcing nature of these frameworks, and social relations of oppression, work to distort human identity and harmonious relations between humans and nonhuman nature. If pastoral counselors are to address the issues of the time responsibly, they must draw from psychological and theological models which are integrative, holistic, and especially sensitive to the power and intimacy of the relationship between humans and the earth.

In Chapter 1, ecological consciousness and Christian and Enlightenment models are discussed. Transformative feminism is presented as an integrative, ecological framework from which to evaluate theologies and psychological theories with regard to the ways they address the following issues: the interconnections among oppressions, diversity and pluralism, domination, human relationship with nonhuman nature, ethical concerns, and the appropriate use of

technology. Chapter 2 is an overview of the theologies of Carter Heyward and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Chapter 3 is an overview of Gestalt therapy. In Chapter 4, the material presented in Chapters 2 and 3 is examined in light of the transformative feminist framework. The implications of a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling theory are discussed. The concept of "place," as it is used by phenomenological geographers, is a central thread weaving together the healing of people, the growth of organic community, the development of natural, moral decision making, experience of the holy, and environmental healing. In Chapter 5, the practical implications of a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling are considered. This includes a discussion of how the body, place, community, and economic justice are important to therapy. Relying on the work of Martin Buber, authentic, simple meeting is presented as the path for healing and reconciliation with self, others, and the earth.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been supported in my study by many and I am grateful. I want to thank my parents, Mary and Joe Filippi, for giving me birth, a rich cultural heritage, and the vineyards.

I have been blessed with good friends. Linda Terrill's loving presence and laughter nourishes me deep. Her children, Michael and Adriene, help me to remember how holy life is. Katherine Wells has been on this journey with me from the day I filled out my application for graduate study, offering friendship, tea, faith in my abilities, editorial skills, and consolation. Years ago Ruth Krall suggested I read some feminist theology. Little did I know what that simple suggestion would mean to the fabric of my life. Her commitment to women and her integrity continue to support me. Elizabeth Leonard opened my heart with the gift of song and warm bread. Her friendship is a treasure. Christa McNerney, through the example of her own life, continues to teach me of patience, beauty, hope, and faith in the gift of new life. Karin Hillsdale is a steady friend with integrity, courage, and insight. With Holly Brackett, Anne Greene, and Liz Foster, I have learned about sharing home, friendship, and the creation of new family. I am grateful to them for being such wonderful "big sisters" to my daughter during these years of graduate study. With Gretchen McGargile and Edith Cole I have shared evening walks, warm soup, and companionship. Each, in her

own way, has helped me look more deeply into the social realities of our time and see that each of us can make a difference.

My gentle friends and colleagues Christa McNerney, Francesca Cover, Jim Gau, Jim Stumbo, and Glenn Whitlock have taught me about the healing potential of a community where there is love. The recent appearance of an old friend, Claudia Byrd, has helped me to weave together my childhood with my present, and see that the seeds of this dissertation were planted many years ago. With friends Dan Merritt, Steve Smith, and Chris Ives I have reflected on ethics, ecology, gender relationships, and our personal journeys. With new friends Maureen Graham, Jean Semrau, and Jackie Melvin I have had the pleasure of good conversation and much needed laughter during these last months of study.

While I have not had much recent time with Elizabeth Strahan, Margaret Edwards, Michele Papen-Daniels, Alison Rogers, Lori Dick, June Peters, Tess Tessier, and Alison Denning I have felt them near in this writing and recognize their influence on my work. Helen Kaufman has been with me through some dark times, helped me to see myself more clearly and open to the possibility of living with joy. Sue Sheng has helped me in many ways this last year. I am grateful for her wisdom and her friendship. Finally, without the healing gifts and loving friendship of Barbara Churchill this writing may never have happened.

Dr. Daryl Smith and Dr. Demaris Wehr were both important in helping and encouraging me to reflect on women's development and spirituality. I am especially grateful to Dr. C. Dean Freudenberger, whose passionate concern for the earth led me into early thinking

about the relationship between environmental issues and pastoral counseling. Dr. Toshihiro Takami of the Asian Rural Institute has touched me deeply. His quiet presence, his compassion, and his belief in the power of "common-sense" and "radical listening" have been important to the development of this dissertation. Dr. Howard Clinebell opened the way for this writing in his call for ecological sensitivity among pastoral counselors and through his own concern for the future of the earth.

I am grateful to my committee. Dr. Paul Schurman has had faith in me from the first days of graduate study, encouraging me as a counselor, listening to me in despair, and supporting my ideas. Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore has helped me extend my reach and work with greater clarity. Finally, with gentle kindness, Dr. Dan Rhoades has met me in dialogue. In their own ways each has guided and nourished, helping me to believe in myself, my often wandering, mosaic, intuitive musings, and the power of learning.

I am grateful for classmates Gail Unterberger and Jim Farris, with whom I have studied and commiserated in the writing of our dissertations, and Barbara Smith-Gilbert, whose caring for the earth and commitment to everyday living has been an inspiration. Elaine Walker helped with editorial skills and patient understanding.

Jim Thomas walked with me through early years of graduate study. I am grateful to Jim for our many sharings and introduction to the Religious Society of Friends. Since that first, rather tense and squirmish hour of worship, I have come to find my home among Friends. I am especially grateful to the members of Claremont

Monthly Meeting who continue to open themselves, and help me open, to truth.

Finally, my daughter Anna Lucas has endured my years of graduate study with amazing patience and good humor, and Carl Hertel continues to be a creative partner in living and in the cultivation of the flower of relations we know as family. Anna's blossoming spirit is an inspiration and source of hope. Carl's companionship brings into my life warmth, color, love, and a renewed sense of place.

To all I am grateful. For all I wish peace.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter Anna. May she always walk tall, have the courage to love, and remember her childhood God, "All-ness."

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Personal Reflections

The feminist theorists who comprise The Mud Flower Collective support research and teaching that begins with lived experience in relationship. They make a distinction between experientially based education and intellectual and theological methodology that links excellence with objectivity.¹ Creative, educative dialogue begins with the study and sharing of our life experience.

To begin with our lives is to make a pedagogical and epistemological claim. Rather than presuming to possess a universal knowledge of what feminism or theology or education is, we assume that the most honest--and therefore most intellectually sound--contribution we can make at the outset of our work is to name and examine our experiences of feminism, theology, and education. In so sharing we begin to realize that our knowledge is both relational (born in dialogue with others) and relative (contingent upon the difference it makes to our lives and the lives of others). ²

With this claim, that our lives are shaped by the particularities of our communities and that theory rises out of lived experience, I choose to begin this dissertation. I will focus on the earth and pastoral counseling by naming and examining several of the

¹ The Mud Flower Collective, God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education (New York: Pilgrim, 1985).

² The Mud Flower Collective, 25.

formative experiences in my life, experiences which have brought me to this writing.³ In doing this I describe what has been my reality. It is both the source of insight and the limitation of this work. I speak as one of a specific place, sex, race, class, age, and species. My vision is particular and my understanding relative to the context of my life.

My family in the United States grows grapes and makes wine, my family in Italy farms wheat. As a child I lived in a vineyard filled with the magic of wind, rain, sun, and the cyclic round of fruition and decay. Body memories call forth the feel of the sun on my bare back as I built and crawled into a womb space made from the clippings of pruned vines. I remember the pungent smell of pumice spread on fields, the hot sand burning the soles of my feet as I ran to find shade, the changing quality of light filtering through grapevines, horned toads and cottontails who always came to visit, and the open sky as I lay on my back, hands behind my head. I remember sitting at the kitchen table, looking out a west facing window to see the sun set behind a windbreak of Eucalyptus in the summer and an open field in the winter. It was to the fields that I ran when I needed solace and healing from the violence of an adult world. I can see my grandmother bending over rows of zinnia and vinca in the early morning, watering with a glass jar and hose. It was a world of rich sensual experience, deep feeling, and wonder. It was real. It was simple. It is where I came to know the holy.

³ I am using "the earth" to denote the entirety of the biosphere, including all landscapes, all species, and all dynamic life/death processes.

As a child I was aware that my family was different from the families of my school friends because my father and my maternal grandparents had immigrated from Italy. My parents and grandmother spoke Italian. "The family" was the central focus of our lives. We ate baccala, polenta, rabbit stew, pasta filled with spinach and cow brains. We associated with other immigrants, went to monthly meetings of the Sons of Columbus, and played bocce. The women and children went to Catholic mass weekly, the men on feast days. I remember my father talking about the injustice between the wealth of the Vatican and the poverty of the peasants in Italy. He had little use for the church. The adults often talked about family in Italy, the hardship my father knew during World War I, the seasons and weather in Italy compared to our own, and the landscapes of my parents' home provinces. The roots to place are deep and not altogether transplanted to this country. My parents' identities are powerfully determined by their land of origin. Italy and who they are cannot be separated. I remember my father talking about "the Americans" forty years after immigrating, as though we were not "American." Because my skin is white, and because I went to schools which did not recognize my difference, I was easily assimilated and soon lost my ethnic identity. Yet, at a deep level I never felt a part of mainstream American culture; the fit was never quite right, always a little off balance. As a child I knew difference, I did not know judgement or value. As an adult I learned that the differences I experienced carried pejorative value when compared to the Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, middle-class values and ethos of the dominant culture. For example, the importance of familial identity

and fidelity, a strong aspect of Italian culture, is not valued in American culture where autonomy and self determination are emphasized. Such allegiance is looked upon as regressive. As an adult I also learned how intimately identity, culture, and place are associated, and how much my family and I had lost in their journey across the Atlantic.

In 1969, as an undergraduate at a Jesuit university, I enrolled in a sociology course dealing with the social and psychological dimensions of urban living, the impact of industrialization on the earth, the destruction of traditional cultures and social change. I became aware of what seemed to be well hidden facts about the destruction of the biosphere. I was shocked and did not understand why popular attention was not focused on the realities of the destruction of the world's forests, polluted waters and air, desertification, diminished fertility of land, toxic waste disposal, population control, and renewable energy research. Why were these issues not being discussed in our homes, in our religious communities, among healing professionals and among world leaders? Why were we pretending the earth was not in danger? How had our senses become so deadened that we did not realize the damage of our actions and the imbalance in our lives? We could see the air was brown, the waters so dirty that fish could not live, the ravaged hillsides of clear-cut forests. We knew that fewer birds came into our lives, fewer butterflies, that there was less song, less color, less beauty. We knew that many thousands of children died of starvation every day. Why were we silent? Why were we not talking to each other about these atrocities? I began to awaken and I was in

pain. Twenty years have passed since those first realizations. What few indigenous peoples and cultures remain intact are hanging by a thread. Racism continues to exist as a deep psychic and social virus living on our fear of difference and other. Women continue to be marginalized and dominated while gay and lesbian people are feared and oppressed. The homogenization of the industrial, technological era threatens the diversity of cultural expression and offers little that we might recognize as real. We are left rootless and without deep identity in place or community. The economics of industrialization and the consumerism it promotes thrives by exploitation of the majority of the world's people and the earth, while military expenditures grow and the possibility of nuclear annihilation is ever present. Finally, the environmental crises are now so extreme that we can no longer ignore their presence and the necessity for responsible action.⁴ I have come to see that the denigration and domination of women, the destruction of indigenous peoples and cultures, racial prejudice, the fear and oppression of gay and lesbian people, the exploitation of the labors of some groups of people for the benefit of others, and the destruction of the earth have the same roots. I believe that dualistic structures of consciousness, value hierarchies reflected in western theology and science, and social structures of domination are responsible for our personal and environmental brokenness.

⁴ During the two years that I have researched and written this dissertation there has been a tremendous growth in popular and international awareness of the environmental issues with which we are faced.

Through studying Zen Buddhism and feminist psychology and theology, I have begun to see the relationship between ecological and feminist concerns.⁵ The problems of our times rise from our seeing "other" as distinct, separate and of less value than "self." The exploitation and domination of those who are thought to be of less value is justified by such thinking. The natural, ecological, harmonious diversity of life's patterns is replaced with human hierarchies: nature below culture, man above woman, lower and upper classes, white persons above persons of color. Social relations of domination and dualistic categories of consciousness work together to destroy life. Patriarchy, as it affects human consciousness and social organization is rooted in these structures: racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and anthropocentrism.⁶ These oppressions cannot be separated if we are to understand the complexity of the problems before us. The examination of one requires an awareness of the intricacy of the interconnections among all oppressions and the ways human consciousness and social structures influence each other.

I am a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Quaker testimonies on peace, justice, sexual and racial equality, simplicity,

⁵ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women (Boston: Beacon, 1976); Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk (1983; reprint, Boston: Beacon, 1983); Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind. Beginners Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice, ed. Trudy Dixon (New York: Weatherhill, 1970).

⁶ Sheila D. Collins, A Different Heaven and Earth (Valley Forge: Judson, 1974), 161. Collins writes that "Racism, sexism, class exploitation, and ecological destruction are four interlocking pillars upon which the structure of patriarchy rests." I have added a fifth category, heterosexism.

and concerns about ecology, and gay and lesbian persons have guided my thinking about the origins of the many faces of oppression. I hold myself accountable in this writing to Friends, living and dead, and to the tradition of Quaker faith and practice.

Problem Statement

Environmental Crises and Ecological Consciousness

The present environmental crises exist across boundaries of race, sex, country, age, class, and species. They affect individuals, families, and communities. They affect the earth in its entirety. The summer of 1988 brought unprecedented heat, drought, toxic wastes washing on North American shores, along with extreme air pollution. In the spring of 1989 there was a massive oil spill in Prince William Sound which continues to destroy the delicate ecology of the area. In the winter of 1990 the seas off the shore of Morocco endured an oil spill twice that released into Prince William Sound. While the realities of the environmental crises are more real in the late 1980s than they were in the 1960s, many people continue to look at these problems as though they are somehow separate from human consciousness and modern social realities. Technological answers are sought for what are essentially religious, ethical, and psychological questions. Further, when people do become aware of the environmental problems of the world and their culpability in the perpetuation of these problems, they often feel disempowered, not knowing how to begin changing their personal lives and the economic and political structures which support ecologically destructive policies.

In The State of the World 1989 Lester Brown, Christopher Flavin, and Sandra Postel report that the deterioration of the earth is now of such immense proportions that there is nothing in the foreseeable future to change the accelerating pace.⁷ At best the destruction can be stopped before it becomes unmanageable and totally out of control, bringing environmental, economic, and social chaos. They write that "The immediate challenge is to translate a common vision of a world at risk into the international alliances and bold actions needed to safeguard the earth."⁸ They suggest that responsibility for the future ultimately lies with individuals. Everyone must get involved in making the changes in values and behavior which will save the earth. Brown, Flavin and Postel point out that social change can only take place when our perception of what constitutes the world changes. People must begin to see and think of life in terms of the interrelatedness of all that exists rather than separate and autonomous parts. Brown, Flavin, and Postel suggest that people cross a "perceptual threshold" when through education, another person, or a life event they are helped to see and experience the world in a different way. Often, the new perception gives rise to a new ethical dimension and more effective response. If human and nonhuman life on earth is to survive it is critical that people cross the perceptual threshold from modern

⁷ Lester R. Brown, Christopher Flavin and Sandra Postel, "Forward," State of the World 1989, ed. Linda Starke (New York: Norton, 1989).

⁸ Lester R. Brown, Christopher Flavin and Sandra Postel, "A World at Risk," State of the World 1989, ed., Linda Starke (New York: Norton, 1989), 5.

dichotomous thinking to an ecological perception of reality and take actions to protect the delicate harmony of ecological balance.⁹

Many have pointed to western, Enlightenment thinking as being responsible for dualistic, mechanistic, and hierarchical understanding of the human/nature interface and patriarchal domination. Others point to earlier periods as representing the rise of the patriarchal domination of women and nature.¹⁰ The transformation to ecological consciousness which Brown, Flavin, and Postel advocate is a consciousness beyond patriarchy, modernity, and humanism.¹¹ With these fundamental perceptual changes people

⁹ Ecology focuses on the interrelationships that work together to support life. "Ecological science concerns itself with the interrelationships among all forms of life. It aims to harmonize nature, human and nonhuman. It is an integrative science in an age of fragmentation and specialization. It is also a critical science which grounds and necessitates a critique of our existing society. It is a reconstructive science in that it suggests directions for reconstructing human society in harmony with the natural environment." Ynestra King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," n.p., n.p., n.d.; reprinted in Judith Plant, ed., Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism, (Philadelphia: New Society, 1989), 18. A more complete discussion of ecological theory will follow in Chapter 1 in the Eco-feminist sub-section.

¹⁰ Charles Birch, and John Cobb, The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution (1980; reprint, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). Enlightenment thinkers suggest that individuals exist autonomously, that bodies function much like a machine, and that there is an essential hierarchy among species. A more complete discussion of Enlightenment thought will follow later in Chapter 1 in the Conceptual Design section. While in this dissertation i am writing from the perspective that Enlightenment philosophy and science and traditional dualistic Christianity are responsible for the destruction of an organic understanding of reality it must be noted that others believe that the patriarchal domination of women and nature began with the Indo-European invasions from the Eurasian steppes into Old Europe during the neolithic era. For a fuller explanation of this view see Marija Gimbutas, Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

¹¹ Charlene Spretnak, The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1986). Spretnak writes convincingly about the necessity of moving beyond the

will understand themselves as being part of a vast, interrelated field of which nothing is separate. They can then change patterns of living and mobilize for the work of changing social structures of oppression and domination. Identity influences ethical behavior. Such changes support a growing understanding of ecological realities. When people have experiences of relatedness that help them experience life as a whole fabric and to know that they exist only in relationship, behaviors which violate the earth will be fewer. Change comes when people can see deeply into the reality of human identity and the effects of human actions to the earth.

Brown, Flavin, and Postel believe that the next decade is the turn-around decade. Ecosystems simply cannot endure the stress much longer. People will either undergo changes in perception and behavior to help regenerate the earth's harmonious balance or the earth will no longer be able to support life.

Up until now, environmental organizations, both national and local, have provided the impetus for efforts to restore and protect the planet. Numerous citizens' groups have organized to remedy problems directly touching their lives, whether it be planting trees in a Third World village or opposing the siting of a toxic waste dump in a U.S. community. The challenge now is for other groups to get involved. Collectively, churches, civic groups, and professional societies represent an enormous potential for planetary reclamation. Rotary International, Girl Scouts, the International Association of Agricultural Economists, the Lutheran Church, the International Society of Tropical Foresters, the American Medical Association, and the

conceptual designs of patriarchy, modernity, and humanism, toward an ecological understanding of life.

International Jaycees are but a few of the thousands of groups that could play a part.¹²

The tasks are immense and will require the efforts of everyone if life is to continue into the next generations.

Pastoral Counseling and Ecological Consciousness

Certainly pastoral counselors must be included among those groups that can play a part in the transformation of consciousness and the transformation of human relationship with the earth. Drawing from resources in theology and psychology, pastoral counselors can offer significant and unique input to the discussion of the theoretical, practical, and ethical dimensions of the necessary changes which may lead to healing, appropriate action, and a new social order. Appropriate action suggests a contextual understanding of a situation such that one will respond in ways that meet the reality of the occasion. While many different responses may be appropriate, each will reflect awareness of what is needed. Appropriate action suggests an integrated responsiveness that rises from deep relationship and understanding.

Because most theory and practice of pastoral counseling is rooted in Enlightenment science and philosophy, as well as Christian theology that is heavily influenced by Platonic dualisms and apocalyptic Judaism, pastoral counseling does not have an ecological framework from which to work.¹³ Pastoral counseling

¹² Lester R. Brown, Christopher Flavin, Sandra Postel, "Outlining a Global Action Plan," State of the World 1989, ed. Linda Starke (New York: Norton, 1989), 194.

¹³ William S. Schmidt, "Toward a Cosmological Foundation for Pastoral Care," Journal of Pastoral Care 37, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 207-216; Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (1975; reprint, New York: Seabury, 1975). Schmidt speaks about the limitations of the

largely reflects the western, dualistic worldview. The intrapsychic and interpersonal dimensions of being human have been emphasized while the environmental context of living has not played a significant role in theory or practice. Virtually every helping profession ignores the nonhuman context of human life. Harold Searles addresses this bias as it exists in the psychiatric and psychoanalytic literature and practice.¹⁴ He speaks about the importance of the nonhuman environment to human development.

The nonhuman environment, far from being of little or no account to human personality development, constitutes one of the most basically important ingredients of human psychological existence. . . . there is within the human individual a sense, whether at a conscious or unconscious level, of relatedness to his nonhuman environment, that this relatedness is one of the transcendently important facts of human living. . . .¹⁵

Howard Clinebell writes that pastoral counselors must find systemic ways of understanding human life, human relationships with each other, and human relationship with the biosphere.¹⁶ Yet, reliance upon the insights of depth psychology and a theology of transcendence, limited understanding of the power and depth of human intimacy with the earth and the centrality of place to

modern behavioral sciences with regards to dualisms and Ruether speaks about the roots of Christian dualisms.

¹⁴ Harold F. Searles, The Nonhuman Environment: In Normal Development and in Schizophrenia (New York: International Universities Press, 1960), 5.

¹⁵ Searles, 5.

¹⁶ Howard J. Clinebell Jr., "Toward Envisioning the Future of Pastoral Counseling and AAPC," Journal of Pastoral Care 37, no. 3 (Sept. 1983): 180-194.

identity and well-being, have left pastoral counselors unable to respond to Clinebell's concern. One important exception to this has been the work of the Pastoral Care Network for Social Responsibility. Concerned with the nuclear arms race and the promotion of peace, this group has shown awareness of the growing environmental dangers. The possibility of nuclear war is, of course, the most obvious environmental hazard.

In the past ten years very little has been written in pastoral counseling directly addressing our intimacy with the earth and the environmental degradation which affects human experience and the harmonious functioning of the earth. Nor has there been much discussion about the responsibility of pastoral counselors at this very important threshold.¹⁷ The time is ripe for pastoral counselors to enter the dialogue for the sake of individuals, families, communities, and the earth.

Pastoral counselors must look at environmental issues from the perspective of healing the individual and healing the earth. Human integrity and well being cannot be understood apart from the integrity and well being of the earth. The popular saying "Think Globally/Act Locally" might well point toward the multidimensional vision necessary for pastoral counseling. Clinebell addresses the multiple dimensions of healing when he writes about the necessity for pastoral counseling becoming more ecologically conscious.

¹⁷ A more complete review of the literature in pastoral counseling concerned with human relatedness to the earth and the development of ecological consciousness follows in Chapter 1.

Pastoral counseling needs to become more ecologically aware. Helping clients to develop a nurturing interrelatedness with the great mother of all living things, Mother Earth, can be one of the most healing things we can do. Increasing ecological consciousness, conscience and caring can produce a double benefit--the healing which comes from opening our bodies and souls to nature, and the motivation to treat the biosphere of spaceship earth with more caring respect. Theologically, we need to integrate our belief in the goodness of creation with our counseling more fully.¹⁸

The call to "integrate our belief in the goodness of creation with our counseling" is to touch very deep tears in our being. Modernity, reflected in western, industrialized societies, has for the most part forgotten about the goodness of creation and does not believe that the earth is holy. To a large extent humans desacralize and trivialize embodied existence.¹⁹ To know embodied existence, embodied reality or embodied relationship suggests a quality of experience that is aware, integrated, sensually engaged, present, and respectful of the body. Rather than celebrate the goodness of creation and the miracle of life itself, humans more often denigrate the body, experience alienation, and live fragmented lives apart from any meaningful contact with the natural cycles of the earth. Work which is associated with the maintenance of life: growing food, cleaning, cooking, caring for the young, aged and dying is looked upon as being of less value than work which does not so directly involve the body. Few people birth with a full moon and die into the moon's

¹⁸ Clinebell, "Toward Envisioning the Future," 191.

¹⁹ Pierre E. LaCocque, "Desacralizing Life and Its Mystery: The Jonah Complex Revisited," Journal of Psychology and Theology 10 (Summer 1982): 113-119.

waning. Few people know the origins of the water they drink or the food they eat. Too few people hallow this life.²⁰ Too few people experience the holy in their everyday lives. The experience of organic connectedness, of holy relationship with the the earth is lost to a fragmented sense of self, other, community, the holy, and the earth. Acts of domination, oppression, and exploitation have laid waste to the intricate ecological web of the earth, while the richness of human experience has been diminished. The fact that ecological peril exists, that millions of humans and members of other species suffer, reflects the fact that humans are not in right relationship with the earth or each other, that they do not "believe in the goodness of creation." Right relationship suggests equality, an attitude of respect and mutuality, and a process of relationship that affirms the integrity and possibilities of the individuals, the relationship itself, and the larger context of the earth. Addiction, alienation, violence, fear of death, depression, and despair rise out of the distorted perception of self, other, nature, and the holy.²¹ They exist because people have forgotten that the creation is indeed very good, that human life is of the earth, and that humans are intimately related to all that was, is and ever will be. Each reality, ecological peril and personal suffering, is a mirror for the other and

²⁰ Martin Buber, To Hallow This Life, ed. Jacob Trapp (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958). I am indebted to Buber's understanding of relationship, the holy and organic community.

²¹ Joanna Rogers Macy, Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age (Philadelphia: New Society, 1983).

cannot be separated. Susan Griffin speaks to the human condition of fragmentation, alienation, unawareness, and ecological peril.

We who are born into this civilization have inherited a habit of mind. We are divided against ourselves. We no longer feel ourselves to be a part of this earth . . . very young, we even learn to disown a part of our own being. We come to believe that we do not know what we know. We grow used to ignoring the evidence of our own experience, what we hear or see, what we feel in our own bodies. . . . In some places the sky is perpetually gray, and the air is filled with a putrid smell. . . . But we do not read these perceptions as signs of our own peril. . . . We have traded our real existence, our real feelings for a delusion. . . . We deny all evidence at hand that this civilization, which has shaped our minds, is also destroying the earth.²²

A regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling can contribute richly to healing the cultural and personal splits about which Griffin speaks. To be earth-centered is to be attendant to the radically relational matrix of non-human nature in which humans are embedded. An earth-centered focus is grounded in the understanding that culture is not set apart from nature and that humans are in relationship with all that is the earth. Individual human identity and integrity are dependent on the integrity of the earth. All aspects of the earth are of intrinsic value, working in a synergistic way to support the whole of life.²³ To regenerate is "to be formed again:

²² Susan Griffin, "Split Culture," The Schumacher Lectures, eds. Satish Kumar, Blond, and Briggs (1984); reprinted in Judith Plant, ed., Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism (Philadelphia: New Society, 1989), 7.

²³ Arne, Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary, Inquiry 16 (1973): 95-100. Naess is one of the early proponents of the "deep ecology" movement. "Deep ecology" grows out of the concern that the earlier ecology movement was unsustainable and short sighted because it lacked a spiritual dimension. While there is a great deal of disagreement among writers in deep ecology and eco-feminist theorists, largely centering on the lack of analysis of power relations

become shaped anew . . . to cause to be spiritually born again, subject to spiritual regeneration."²⁴ The concept of regeneration is important to this dissertation as it points to the ever-changing processes of life and death and the transformative possibilities inherent in all encounters. While it suggests positive change, integrative change, regeneration does not suggest perfection. Regeneration is used to denote creative transformation of that which has been broken. Regeneration is dependent on the past as it affects the present, moving into the future.

Unlike theory which does not incorporate a practical component, pastoral counseling can offer both theory and practice that clarifies the relationship between human continuity with nonhuman nature and human uniqueness among the earth's creatures. Pastoral counseling can help people learn to live in ways which are respectful of nonhuman nature and at the same time, remain responsive to human uniqueness and need. In helping people awaken to the reality of embodied experience and the satisfaction of appropriate action in this time of unprecedented suffering, pastoral counseling can contribute to the earth's healing and the healing of persons.

Thesis

The brokenness and healing of humans and the brokenness and healing of the earth are intimately related. The theologies of Carter

among deep ecologists, Naess makes two important points. First, "human self-realization" cannot be known apart from deepened awareness of human relatedness to nonhuman, and second, "bio-centric equality" suggests that all aspects of the biosphere are equal in value and have an equal right to live and reach full maturity.

²⁴ "Regenerate," Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

Heyward and Rosemary Radford Ruether, and the psychology of Gestalt therapy, informed by transformative feminist theory, offer pastoral counseling an integrative and ecological framework for theory and practice.²⁵

Research Focus and Questions

An ecological, and feminist emphasis in theory and practice can deepen and expand the response of pastoral counseling to human alienation from the earth. Such an emphasis can open people to ecological consciousness and expanded identity with the earth, help people to address the despair they experience when confronted with the peril now facing all life, provide an example of ecologically balanced living, and support and inform decisions in choosing more ecological and harmonious living patterns. As understanding and work for the healing of the earth is extended into political and social spheres, a regenerative, earth-centered pastoral focus can deepen and broaden the spiritual and ethical discussions so often overlooked in secular theory. Pastoral counseling has theological resources in feminist liberation theology and psychological resources in Gestalt. When these theories are brought into dialogue around ecological concerns, pastoral counseling can offer a unique contribution to the multi-disciplinary literature concerned with human relatedness to the earth.

Feminist theologians have analyzed patriarchal religion and the ideologies and structures of injustice which are oppressive and

²⁵ In this dissertation I will be using the literature in Gestalt therapy. This is distinguished from Gestalt psychology. Gestalt from this point on, refers to Gestalt Therapy.

violent to women, children, people of color, and the earth.²⁶ Feminist theorists have analyzed issues of power, authority, androcentrism, and male dominance, pointing to the destructiveness of patriarchal hierarchies. While there are feminist theologians who have reversed the dualistic structures of patriarchy in favor of women, some feminist theologians have proposed theologies of transformation rooted in relationship and justice. In their fullest expression, they offer hope for the healing of women, men, children, and the earth. These theologians recognize holy transcendence in the depth and fullness of immanence, in organic community. Knowing that the holy exists in and through the relationships of the community of the earth can expand the pastoral understanding of presence, grace, and reconciliation. Understanding the holy as alive in shared, organic community, in everyday living, can help pastoral counselors better attend to the development of ecologically sensitive consciousness and just social structures.

Gestalt offers an organismic understanding of what it means to be human. In its earliest form it was radically relational, emphasizing the interface of the organism/environment field as the locus of lived experience and self identity. Gestalt roots in field theory and emphasis on organism/environmental exchange, the importance of body/mind integration, communication through touch, and balanced self boundaries, are important to the discussion of ecological and human well-being. Gestalt theorists also point to the

²⁶ Carter Heyward, Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation (1984; reprint, New York: Pilgrim, 1984); Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk.

centrality of change in life processes, addressing our mistaken belief in unchanging permanence through time.²⁷

There are several questions that must be considered in thinking about human relationship with the earth. What does it mean to be a human being? How shall humans relate to other aspects of nature? How shall humans relate to each other? How do humans experience the holy?²⁸ These questions call for an examination of fundamental assumptions about identity, health and well-being, relationship, right action and the holy. These basic questions will be considered as they inform the practice of clinical pastoral counseling.

This dissertation can contribute to the literature in the following five ways:

1. By adding to the presently sparse discussion of pastoral counseling and ecological concerns, thus expanding the concerns of pastoral counseling beyond the individual and the family focus.

2. By discussing transformative feminist and eco-feminist concerns in the theory and practice of pastoral counseling, including discussions of: dualistic thinking, power relations, the multiple oppressions of race, class, sex, sexual orientation, and nature.²⁹

²⁷ Frederick S. Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality (1951; reprint, New York: Dell, 1951).

²⁸ Spretnak, The Spirituality of Green Politics, 45. In addressing the core values of the political Green Party, Spretnak suggests that the first three questions are central to the development of the Green movement.

²⁹ The term "eco-feminism" was first used by Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book La Feminisme ou la Mort, published in 1974. It is referred to by Kirkpatrick Sale, "Ecofeminism--A New Perspective," Nation, 26 Sept. 1987: 302-305. Eco-feminism grows out of the belief that the oppressions of women and nature are related at a deep

3. By offering psychological and theological grounding for a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling.
4. By offering practical suggestions for ways of integrating ecological concepts into the practice of clinical pastoral counseling, empowering people to curb the tide of destruction and heal human alienation from nonhuman nature.
5. By speaking to the importance of appreciating the holy in relationships among humans and between humans and nonhumans.³⁰

Methodology and Organization

The study is cross disciplinary at a theoretical level. Methodology will be literary research and critical analytic study. Chapter 1 includes a review of prior research in pastoral counseling that is focused on ecology, and a discussion of how this dissertation is a contribution. Drawing from the work of eco-feminist and transformative feminist theorists, a conceptual design from which to draw a regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling is outlined.³¹ Chapter 2 is a review of the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Carter Heyward in feminist theology. Chapter 3 is a

level, and rise out of the conceptual framework of patriarchy. The term "Transformative feminism" comes from Karen J. Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," Environmental Ethics 9, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 3-20. Warren distinguishes transformative feminism from the other major branches of feminism. Transformative feminism takes eco-feminist concerns to the center of its theory and practice. A fuller explanation of transformative feminism occurs later in this chapter in the section entitled Transformative Feminist Framework.

³⁰ "Authentic" is used to denote that something or someone is real and genuine.

³¹ Ynestra King, "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology and Nature/Culture Dualism," Feminist Reconstructions of Self and Society, eds. Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo (New York: Rutgers University Press, forthcoming); Warren.

review of the major theoretical themes of Gestalt. Primary theorists used are Frederick (Fritz) Perls, Paul Goodman, Ralph Hefferline, Gary Yontef, Laura Perls, Lynne Jacobs, Joel Latner, Erving Polster, and Miriam Polster.³² In Chapter 4, major themes, relationships among themes, missing themes, and how the work of the above named theorists can contribute to a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling are identified. Finally, Chapter 5 extends the theoretical discussion to the practical dimensions of pastoral counseling. While a fully articulated theory and practice of a regenerative, earth-centered pastoral focus is beyond the scope of this dissertation, a preliminary design is suggested. This study includes no field research, no experimental or empirical study, no gathering of data or statistical analysis.

Scope and Limitations

The work of transformative feminist theorist Karen J. Warren and eco-feminist theorist Ynestra King is used to present a conceptual framework for a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling. Important areas of discussion in the theological literature include humanity, divinity, immanence/transcendence, relationship, embodiment, community, nature, justice, and love. Important concepts that are examined in the Gestalt literature include field theory, contact boundary, communication and touch, awareness, figure-ground, and the significance of the present moment to lived experience. No attempt is made to review all the

³² Frederick Perls was commonly known as Fritz Perls. I will use Fritz Perls in this dissertation, except in bibliographic entries where Frederick Perls is used.

work of any theorist nor is it assumed that all theorists in a given field agree with each other. Finally, while this dissertation relies heavily upon the critical work of many feminist theorists, and could not exist without that important work, it is primarily oriented toward constructive theory and practice.

Prior Research in Pastoral Counseling

While there has been a great deal of work done in theology, ethics, feminist spirituality and environmental psychology with regard to human relatedness with the earth, little has been written in the field of pastoral counseling.³³ This dearth is difficult to understand except to note that pastoral counselors have relied heavily on the insights of depth psychology and have only recently begun to integrate systems theory in a deep way.³⁴ While systems theory is used widely in marital and family counseling the ecological web of systemic relationship with nonhuman nature remains largely overlooked. With an ecological framework the understanding of family dynamics will be expanded. The actual day-

³³ In theology there is currently a swell of research focused on creation spirituality and Christian ethics and ecology. In August 1987 the first North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology convened in an effort to articulate a Christian ethic of ecology. Process theology and interfaith dialogues, particularly between Christians and Buddhists, have raised environmental concerns to the foreground. At the same time, environmental psychologists have tried to understand the human being as human-being-in-context, looking to the reciprocal effects of what it means to be of our environments. Robert Aitken, The Mind of Clover: Essays in Zen Buddhist Ethics (San Francisco: North Point, 1984); Birch and Cobb; Carol Christ, The Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Frederick W. Drueger, ed., Christian Ecology: Building an Environmental Ethic for the Twenty-First Century (San Francisco: North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology, 1988).

³⁴ Howard Clinebell, "Toward Envisioning the Future of Pastoral Counseling," 188.

to-day work of clinical pastoral counseling would often seem to exclude ecological concerns, as clinicians are involved in helping people in crisis situations, family conflict, grief, and individual problems in living. However, ecological consciousness, ecological identity, and an eco-feminist conceptual framework can only enhance the work already being done, as well as open areas as yet unidentified. For example, the angst children feel when confronted with the realities of breathing impure air, drinking contaminated water, and the curtailment of their activities because of pollution may become a source of clinical concern with an ecological focus. Other issues for pastoral concern may include: the impoverishment of individual identity and life experience because of diminished ecological diversity and a violated landscape, the hopelessness young people feel because of the enormity of the problems that await them in adulthood, and the physical breakdown of the body under environmental stress. Perhaps the largest issue facing all persons who are alive is whether there will even be continuing generations of life. Before Hiroshima and Nagasaki, before Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, before the hole in the ozone layer was discovered, one could be secure in knowing that new generations of life would follow. That simply is no longer true. The cutting off of the future has become a reality of modern life; it is one that pastoral counselors must consider.

When pastoral counselors begin to see themselves in context they will begin to hear the issues clients bring to session in different ways. Perhaps client's stories will be heard in the context of ecological identity, not only depth psychology or family systems

theory. People tell their stories only when counselors can hear, while counselors selectively respond to what they can hear. As pastoral counselors become more sensitized to the range and subtlety of environmental stories and they more fully integrate the insights and work of feminist and gestalt theorists, environmental concerns will be better understood. As counselors hear stories of incest and no longer think of them as hysteria, counselors will come to hear and respect stories rising from environmental pain and alienation from the earth. Learning to hear will lead counselors to creative alternatives in helping people find ways of living more harmoniously, more sustainably, more humanly.

Prior research falls into two main categories: the cosmological foundation of the teaching and practice of pastoral counseling and the treatment of people who experience environmentally induced suffering. I will briefly review the work in each category.

Cosmology and Pastoral Counseling

William E. Schmidt examines the cosmologies of classical science and suggests that they are limited for the practice of pastoral counseling because of their dualistic premises.³⁵

Pastoral care has tended to adhere to psychotherapeutic perspectives which have dualistic cosmologies at their core. This has subsequently resulted in the borrowing of the psychotherapeutic goals which are grounded upon such cosmologies. However, an understanding of the universe in which interconnectedness is the basic reality will result in different goals for the human pilgrimage.³⁶

³⁵ Schmidt, 207-216.

³⁶ Schmidt, 215.

He suggests that the goal of helping people to develop separate selves or autonomous egos may not be appropriate for pastoral therapeutic work. While ego development is an important part of therapeutic work, Schmidt suggests that the search for God entails a transego dimension, and thus, a different orientation.

Further, he notes that pastoral counseling has not adequately examined the cosmological foundations of the psychological schools from which it works, nor created a cosmology of its own. He points to the field of modern physics, particularly the work of David Bohm, as offering a model of an interconnected universe, bringing with it more adequate definitions of spirit, matter, and consciousness.³⁷ Schmidt relies on the work of those in transpersonal psychology, suggesting that pastoral care can use this model as an example of the integration of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of being human.

There currently exists a strong need for a more complete understanding of the realm of spirit. . . . Understanding of this realm cannot occur by analytic, linear, or left-brain methods. Rather, only symbolic or intuitive understanding of spiritual symbols (as expressed through myth, ritual, dream, and higher levels of consciousness) offers us a deeper apprehension of reality. Our focus will then not be the contents of consciousness, but consciousness itself, not knowledge of God, but a "sense of the presence of God." . . . None of this should occur at the expense of the hard-earned expertise pastoral care specialists now demonstrate in their involvement with people in crisis. However, it will require a paradigm shift from exclusively egoic/dualistic

³⁷ David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

perspectives to a transegoic/interconnected stance which knows how to traverse the "farther reaches."³⁸

Schmidt suggests that this paradigm shift will reawaken an interest in Christian spiritual traditions.

While Howard Clinebell does not specifically refer to his concept of "spirit centered wholeness" as a cosmology, he has presented it as a holistic model in the teaching and practice of pastoral counseling.³⁹ The six interdependent dimensions of wholeness include the physical, psychological, interpersonal, institutional, ecological, and spiritual. The spiritual is the integrating dynamic of the whole. Wholeness goes beyond the absence of disease and includes the "presence of positive wellness."⁴⁰ In proposing the interdependent dimensions of wholeness Clinebell addresses the problem of duality.

Wholeness involves the organic unity in an integrated, balanced, interaction among these six dimensions. Clinical evidence shows that our wellness is diminished by the splitting of these aspects of our lives, the underdevelopment of some and the overdevelopment of others.⁴¹

Of the ecological dimension he writes that deepening our relationship with the natural world is both enhancing for the self and potentially healing for the environment.

³⁸ Schmidt, 216.

³⁹ Howard Clinebell, "The Six Dimensions of Wholeness Centered in Spirit," Spirit Centered Wholeness: Beyond the Psychology of Self, eds. H. Newton Malony, Michele Papen-Daniels, and Howard Clinebell (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1988), 9-36.

⁴⁰ Clinebell, "The Six Dimensions of Wholeness Centered in Spirit," 10.

⁴¹ Clinebell, "The Six Dimensions of Wholeness Centered in Spirit," 20.

Ecological wholeness involves opening up and deepening our relationship with the natural environment within which we live and which lives in us. We need the recreation of body, mind, spirit, and relationships which come from opening ourselves to celebrate and enjoy our organic interrelatedness with the natural world. Developing ecological awareness, consciences and caring is essential for interrupting the rape of nature; it is also essential for our own wholeness. . . . Of all the dimensions of wholeness, we have had the least practice in facilitating this aspect.⁴²

C. Margaret Hall suggests that heightened awareness of the complexity and subtlety of the relationships among self, the society, and the universe can aid in the creation of evolutionary changes of consciousness.⁴³ In working with marital relationships she found that functioning improved when individuals were able to see themselves as active and responsible participants both inside and outside of the family structure.

The conscious construction of cosmologies enlarged vision and precipitated changes in behavior, and spouses were able to improve their functioning in relation to each other and in diverse social groups.⁴⁴

Hall suggests that sociological perspectives, with the development of cosmologies, can both change the direction and broaden the field of therapy.

The articles on cosmology point to the importance of pastoral counseling adopting or creating a holistic framework from which to work. Modern models of science do not provide the holistic vision

⁴² Clinebell, "The Six Dimensions of Wholeness Centered in Spirit," 19.

⁴³ C. Margaret Hall, "Cosmology and Therapy," Journal of Religion and Health 25 (Winter 1986): 254-263.

⁴⁴ C. Margaret Hall, 260.

necessary to understand reality and human behavior. The many factors which are part of human development and experience require pastoral counselors to look at the interrelationships of the many aspects of existence and not focus on the intrapsychic depth dimension alone.

Environmental Disease and Pastoral Counseling

Earle P. Barron writes that there are rising numbers of people who are being treated for "ecological illness."⁴⁵ Ecological illnesses are allergic reactions and immunological disorders that arise from different aspects of the modern environment. He writes that "It may appear as an inability to tolerate the 20th century with all its technological by-products."⁴⁶

He suggests there are six areas the pastoral care-giver should be alerted to when working with someone suffering from ecological illness.

(1.) Pastoral counselors should make attempts to increase awareness of the problem and the available resources.

(2.) Pastoral counselors need to develop a well-grounded theological perspective capable of helping a person deal with questions of suffering and responsibility.

(3.) Questions about the meaning of health and its relationship to ecology should be discussed with clients suffering from environmental disease. Such discussions will easily lead to

⁴⁵ Earle P. Barron, "The Pastoral Care of Environmentally Diseased Patients," Journal of Pastoral Care 38, no. 1 (March 1984): 44-51.

⁴⁶ Barron, "The Pastoral Care of Environmentally Diseased Patients," 44.

discussions about Christian understandings of individual and collective salvation.

(4.) The pastoral care-giver should inspire faith and opportunities for worship should be provided for those suffering ecological illnesses.

(5.) The person with "ecological illness" and his/her family members should be supported in whatever ways possible.

(6.) The pastoral-care person should be attuned to the possibility of making appropriate counseling referrals.

Barron's article reflects a beginning sensitivity to the environmental suffering that many experience. He points to the psychological, physical, and spiritual aspects of environmental disease and suggests that it calls us to examine the meaning of ecology and collective salvation within a Christian framework. In so doing he expands the concerns and focus of pastoral counseling beyond the intrapsychic and familial to the earth.

Conceptual Frameworks

A regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling must be rooted in a psychological and theological understanding of the intimacy of human relationship with the earth and based on a conceptual design which addresses the distortions of patriarchy, humanism, and modern philosophy, theology and science. This conceptual design must attend to the multiple oppressions against sex, race, class, sexual orientation and nature. Finally, it must be radically contextual in orientation. Pastoral counseling can then develop a more adequate understanding of what it means to be human and to be of the earth. In so doing, the goals, orientation, and

practice of counseling will change. The work of transformative eco-feminist theorists offers a conceptual framework to which pastoral counselors can refer in evaluating the adequacy of different psychological theories and theologies with regard to feminist and ecological concerns.⁴⁷

Karen J. Warren writes that all people operate out of socially constructed conceptual frameworks or mind sets.⁴⁸ Beliefs, attitudes, and values shape perceptions of self, other, and the earth. Being socially defined, conceptual frameworks are influenced by sex, gender, class, race, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religion, and nationality. Quite simply, a conceptual framework functions as a worldview. In the following sub-sections the basic elements of the Christian and post-enlightenment frameworks, which heavily influence modern religion and science, will be reviewed. The basic elements of a transformative feminist conceptual framework will then be considered.

Christian Framework

Rosemary Radford Ruether writes that "Christianity was born through a fusion of apocalyptic Judaism and Platonic dualism."⁴⁹ In

⁴⁷ Warren, 3-20. Warren suggests that the four leading versions of feminism: liberal feminism, traditional Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism are theoretically inadequate when confronted with ecological concerns. She proposes the need for a transformative feminism which will be based on eco-feminist concerns, the dissolution of dualisms, and the interrelationships among all forms of oppression.

⁴⁸ Warren, 6.

⁴⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "New Woman and New Earth: Women, Ecology, and Social Revolution," New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (1975; reprint, New York: Seabury, 1975), 190.

classical philosophy the authentic self is presented as the soul or transcendent reality which is raised up over physical existence. For Plato the physical, that which is limited and impermanent, is of less value than that which is not affected by time. Within this design the body falls into the lower categories of value while the world of the intellect and ideas, the infinite, is raised up as "the good." Nature is assigned to the physical realm of existence and is therefore inferior to the realm of the infinite, the male intellect. As Ruether and other feminist theologians point out, the mind-body, spirit-nature dualisms of Platonic thought continue to be present in a great deal of traditional Christian theology.⁵⁰

Related to the Platonic dualism separating mind and body and spirit from nature is the extension of the spirit-nature dualism into classist and sexist relations.⁵¹ Women, lower classes, and slaves are thought to be part of the inferior realm of the physical, while males of the upper class are identified with the infinite and transcendent realm of spirit. Ruether writes that the hierarchical mind-body dualism is extended to the social hierarchy.

Here the authentic self is regarded as the soul or transcendent rationality, over against bodily existence. As we have seen, the relation of spirit to body is one of repression, subjugation, and mastery. Material existence is ontologically inferior to mind and the root of moral evil. Moreover, the language of hierarchical dualism is identified with social hierarchy. The hierarchy of spirit over body is

⁵⁰ Carol Christ, "Finitude, Death and Reverence for Life," The Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 213-227.

⁵¹ Ruether, "New Woman New Earth," 189.

expressed in the dominion of males over females, freedmen over slaves, Greeks over "Barbarians." Domination is "naturalized," so that the inferior ontological and moral characteristics of body in relation to mind are identified with the inferior psychobiological "natures" of women and subjugated classes.⁵²

Ruether writes that Aristotle extended the inherent misogyny of Plato's work, it later becoming a world-fleeing, ascetic, misogynist religious worldview. She notes that the theme of alienation from the world present at this time combines with changes in Judaism during the Hellenistic period. The apocalyptic writings reveal a world having slipped away from God's rule. Instead of divine rule diabolic powers have taken control of the world. Within this framework, salvation can only occur with the destruction of the world and the creation of a redeemed spiritual realm where God can again reign sovereign. Human hope for a transcendent realm of spirit and the necessity of worldly destruction shatter the original, created harmonious order.

The mind-body dualism and a deep sense of cosmic alienation dominated Christian spirituality through seventeenth century Protestantism. Nature was split into two poles, that which is holy and that which is demonic. Through redemption in Christ the world was once again restored under God's reign, but outside of the Church nature was demonic and set apart from the holy. Nature was either saved or fallen, holy or demonic, never secular and neutral.⁵³ Ruether notes that nature had to be neutralized and separated from

⁵² Ruether, "New Woman New Earth," 189.

⁵³ Ruether, "New Woman New Earth," 190.

the magical relationship to the demonic if it was to be made available for human use. It was the scientific revolution that brought this final separation and neutralization.

Enlightenment Framework

The modern age is dominated by the conceptual framework of Enlightenment thought. Charles Birch and John Cobb suggest that modern mechanism, materialism, and determinism are part of the same conceptual framework of the philosophy of this era.⁵⁴

The mechanistic model is correlative with the assumption that these ultimate constituents are indeed particles and that these particles are correctly understood as bits of matter. The principles which govern material particles are the laws of mechanics, and the behaviour of larger entities composed exclusively of material particles must be machine-like. Further, such machine-like behaviour is fully deterministic. Hence mechanism, materialism and determinism belong together.⁵⁵

They note that while the mechanistic model has a long history, it was Rene Descartes who made the doctrine an explicit part of modern physics and biology. Birch and Cobb note that Descartes believed all explanation in science should be based in the idea of "mass particles or atoms moving in space" and attempted to explain the phenomena of life in terms of the workings of a machine's coordinated parts.⁵⁶ While the body was very intricate and complex, and because it was made by God and was therefore far more elegant

⁵⁴ Birch and Cobb, 70.

⁵⁵ Birch and Cobb, 70.

⁵⁶ Birch and Cobb, 71.

than a human made machine, it was still a machine. Though Descartes could explain the body mechanistically he could not fit human thought into his model. He suggested that the human being was a machine with a mind attached. It is this bifurcation, the Cartesian dualism separating mind and matter, that became the backdrop for modern scientific thought and exploration. As Birch and Cobb point out very clearly, while the mechanistic model in biology is very important in understanding some levels of functioning, it cannot by itself provide an adequate understanding of the living organism. Yet, the Cartesian dualism separating mind and matter, mechanism, determinism, and materialism have prevailed as central aspects of the dominant conceptual framework for the modern western world.

Carolyn Merchant suggests that the domination of nature and the oppression of women grew out of the changed conceptual frameworks of the scientific and commercial revolutions.⁵⁷ Until the sixteenth-century the European worldview was primarily organismic. For most of the world's people daily life was structured around organic community.

Thus it is not surprising that for sixteenth-century Europeans the root metaphor binding together the self, society, and the cosmos was that of an organism. As a projection of the way people experienced daily life, organismic theory emphasized interdependence among the parts of the human body, subordination of individual to communal purposes in family, community, and state, and vital life permeating the cosmos to the lowliest stone.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Merchant.

⁵⁸ Merchant, 1.

Central to the organic worldview was the identification of nature with a nurturing mother who provided humans with what they needed to live in an ordered and harmonious universe. At the same time a second metaphor was prevalent: nature as wild, uncontrollable, and violent. Both images were associated with the female sex. It is important to note that the identification of the female with nature in either a positive or negative frame is problematic, for it assumes the existence of a nature-culture dualism, identifying one group of people with the natural world and another apart from the natural world. While one must be careful about accepting the nature-culture dualism inherent to the organismic "Mother Earth" metaphor, Merchant's discussion of the growth of the scientific revolution, its attendant conceptual framework, and the subsequent domination of nature and women, is important. The patriarchal, dualistic, mechanistic, deterministic, and materialistic constructs which come out of this era thoroughly permeate present consciousness.

Merchant suggests that as the scientific revolution proceeded the metaphor of the earth as nourishing mother was lost to a mechanized and rational world view, while the image of nature as chaos invited the modern mind to adopt ideas of control and domination.

Two new ideas, those of mechanism and of the domination and mastery of nature, became core concepts of the modern world. An organically oriented mentality in which female principles played an important role was undermined and replaced by a mechanically oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principles in an exploitative

manner. As Western culture became increasingly mechanized in the 1600's, the female earth and virgin earth spirit were subdued by the machine.⁵⁹

Merchant suggests that the earth imaged as a nourishing female had provided cultural restraints on actions that would harm the sensitive balance of ecology. Tearing into the body of the mother to extract minerals would not be possible for those who had an organismic worldview while it was possible for those who were oriented toward commerce and saw the earth in component parts to be used for human needs. As the needs and goals of society changed with the scientific and commercial revolutions, the values associated with the organic model were undercut. Merchant suggests that the new conceptual framework of seventeenth-century philosophy and science was analogous to the structure of machines.

Machines (1) are made up of parts, (2) give particulate information about the world, (3) are based on order and regularity, (perform operations in an ordered sequence), (4) operate in a limited, precisely defined domain of the total context, and (5) give us power over nature. In turn, the mechanical structure of reality (1) is made up of atomic parts, (2) consists of discrete information bits extracted from the world, (3) is assumed to operate according to laws and rules, (4) is based on context-free abstraction from the changing complex world of appearance, and (5) is defined so as to give us maximum capability for manipulation and control over nature.⁶⁰

Merchant continues, suggesting that the rise of mechanistic thought undermined the organismic understanding of self, society, and cosmos, replacing it with a worldview that the universe is an

⁵⁹ Merchant, 2.

⁶⁰ Merchant, 234.

ordered collection of mechanical parts governed by laws and subject to human predictions through rational reasoning processes. The concept of self changed. Rather than an integrated member in a web-like association of beings that functioned together as a harmonious whole, intimately related to society and cosmos, the self was thought to be comprised of a mechanized body with an attached mind. The self of the enlightenment is highly rational and in control of emotions and feelings. Dualistic consciousness prevailed, and from it grew hierarchies of value, social relations of domination, and sanctioned oppression. As women were and are associated with nature, the denigration of nature and women exists coextensively. The modern conceptual framework became dominant and its assumptions about the nature of reality became the background for the biological, physical and behavioral sciences.

Transformative Feminist Framework

A promising branch of feminist theory which attempts to address the modern mind-body, nature-culture dualisms, and the multiple oppressions of women, earth, class, and race is transformative feminism. The transformative feminist framework, aligned with the concerns of eco-feminist theory, offers an alternative from which pastoral counseling can draw for a feminist earth-centered focus in theory and practice.

Karen J. Warren writes that the patriarchal conceptual framework, which has earlier been described as originating in classical philosophy, apocalyptic Judaism, Christianity, and

Enlightenment philosophy and science, encourages the kind of "either-or" thinking which creates normative dualisms.⁶¹

It, thereby, conceptually separates as opposites aspects of reality that in fact are inseparable or complementary and reduces what is a complex, multifaceted reality into two opposing polarities: e.g., it opposes human to nonhuman, mind to body, self to other, reason to emotion.⁶²

She notes that such reductionistic and dualistic thinking is characterized by "value-hierarchical thinking" and a "logic of domination." According to Warren's critique, the roots of the oppression of women and nature are ultimately conceptual, and must therefore be addressed by reconceptualizing what it means to be human and what is appropriate relationship to nonhuman nature. In a similar spirit, eco-feminist theorist Ynestra King addresses the nature-cultural dualism and the danger of identifying woman with nature.⁶³ She sees the central work of eco-feminism to be the creation of a non-dualistic theory and praxis.

The task of an ecological feminism is the organic forging of a genuinely anti-dualistic, or dialectical, theory and praxis. No previous feminism can address this problem adequately from within the framework of their theory and politics, hence the necessity of ecofeminism. Rather than succumb to nihilism, pessimism and an end to reason and history, we seek to enter into history, to habilitate a genuinely ethical thinking--where one uses mind and history to reason from the "is" to the "ought," and to reconcile humanity with

⁶¹ Warren, 6.

⁶² Warren, 6.

⁶³ King, "Healing the Wounds."

nature, within and without. This is the starting point for ecofeminism.⁶⁴

Both King and Warren critique liberal feminism, traditional Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism with regard to their theoretical adequacy in addressing the oppression of women and nature from a nondualistic perspective. For her critique, Warren relies on Alison Jaggar's study of the four branches of feminism.⁶⁵

According to Warren's critique, liberal feminism is rooted in the liberal tradition which emphasizes individual rights and freedom within society. Humans are thought to be rational, separate beings who have essential human characteristics which exist apart from any social context. From a liberal feminist point of view the legal and moral considerations that are part of the feminist stand are incorporated into the discussion of the rights of the nonhuman world. Warren points out the limitation of the liberal view separating the human from the nonhuman worlds in orienting arguments for nonhuman rights around a human focus.

The first ecological implication draws the line of moral considerability at humans, separating humans from nonhumans and basing any claims to moral consideration for nonhumans either on the alleged rights or interests of humans, or on the consequences of such consideration for human well-being. . . .

The second extends the line of moral considerability to qualified nonhumans on the grounds that they, like women (or humans), are deserving of moral consideration in their

⁶⁴ King, "Healing the Wounds," 16.

⁶⁵ Alison M. Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983).

own right: they are rational, sentient, interest carriers, or right holders.⁶⁶

In each case a value hierarchy is maintained and dualisms are considered normative. Warren also points out that the individualism of liberal feminism conflicts with the eco-feminist perspective which emphasizes integrity, relationship, diversity, stability of ecosystems, and equal value among all components of the biosphere. Eco-feminism is holistic and ecological, not individualistic. As such it emphasizes the well being of the eco-community, not the individual set apart from the community.

The traditional feminist Marxist framework understands the oppression of women as being the result of classist and capitalist society. Women are oppressed because through marriage they are held outside of the labor force and made economically dependent. When women are on an equal level with men in the realm of production, producing beyond survival needs, and when the economic structure of the family is addressed in a more egalitarian way, women will know liberation. Warren notes that feminist Marxist theory is based on Marxist theory of class analysis and that feminists must be careful not to set women and men together as a class over nature. She indicates that the Marxist unwillingness to take gender considerations into their analysis is the greatest weakness in their theory because the oppression of women and nature is so thoroughly related to gender systems.

Radical feminism locates the oppression of women in sex-gender systems and in the fact that women bear children. Patriarchy

⁶⁶ Warren, 9.

oppresses women by defining women in terms of men's needs. For example, women are mothers of men's children and sex objects. Women are liberated when the choices around reproduction and sexuality are claimed. Warren writes that "Women will be free when they are no longer bound by the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory child-bearing and child-rearing roles."⁶⁷ One of the central questions among radical feminists is whether or not women are closer to nature than men. Those who believe that making such a connection only affirms the patriarchal stereotype and continues to fuel the fires of oppression, clearly state that women are not different from men, while others celebrate the connection between women and nature, drawing psychological and spiritual nourishment from that relationship.⁶⁸ Radical feminism does not analyze, nor acknowledge thoroughly enough, the social and historical aspects of the oppression of women.

Radical feminism perpetuates the dualisms of patriarchy by either affirming or denying women's closer relationship to nature. As Warren clearly notes, women and men are connected to nature, women and men are alienated from nature, women and men are natural and cultural beings. To deny either pole is to deny a fundamental and deep part of what it means to be part of the human species. More appropriate questions will be focused on the different social patterns that influence how males and females develop differently, for example, how patterns of child rearing affect the

⁶⁷ Warren, 14.

⁶⁸ Warren, 14.

development of intersubjectivity, or how the environment affects the development of contextual thinking and feeling in both males and females.

Finally, socialist feminism attempts to integrate the insights of radical and Marxist feminism, making class and sex-gender issues central to understanding women's oppression. Socialist feminists understand humans to be historically influenced by social and environmental factors of biology, physical environment, sex, class, age, nationality, and race. Of the four leading branches of feminism, it is the most inclusive in its theory and analysis; yet it too falls short in not making an explicit part of its agenda the oppression of nature.

The four main branches of feminism are incomplete as they are currently defined. They do not offer the ecological framework necessary to overcome the normative oppositional dualisms which are so thoroughly a part of modern, western consciousness. Further, they do not effectively address the interrelationships among the multiple forms of oppression. Warren suggests that the articulation of an integrative and transformative feminism, which has as its center an ecological perspective, is critical for the future of feminist theory and practice.

Warren suggests six important points of such a transformative feminist theory:

(1.) A transformative feminism extends the concern for ending women's oppression by making explicit the interconnections among all forms of oppression. In so doing, the task of feminism becomes the liberation of all life from all forms of oppression.

(2.) Diversity must be a central guiding factor in theory and praxis even if this leads to the letting go of the formulation of a feminist theory.

A transformative feminism would acknowledge the social construction of knowledge and a conception of epistemology that takes seriously the felt experiences of women as a subordinate group--however different those experiences may be. As a related point, it would be a call to oppressed groups to collectively assert for themselves their felt experiences, needs, and distinctiveness.⁶⁹

In affirming the diversity of experience transformative, feminist theory invites a pluralism which does not assign value to difference.

(3.) Transformative feminism rejects domination in all its forms and seeks to create an integrative conceptual framework which addresses the conceptual and structural aspects of domination and oppression. While transformative feminist theory stresses the conceptual roots of oppression, there is also emphasis on the relationship between the conceptual and structural spheres. The regeneration of both social structures and consciousness is necessary.

(4.) Transformative feminism requires people to think about what it means to be human.

A transformative feminism would involve a rethinking of what it is to be human, especially as the conception of human nature becomes informed by a nonpatriarchal conception of the interconnections between human and nonhuman nature. This would involve a psychological restructuring of our attitudes and beliefs about ourselves and "our world" (including the nonhuman world, and a

⁶⁹ Warren, 18.

philosophical rethinking of the notion of the self such that we see ourselves as both co-members of an ecological community and yet different from other members of it.⁷⁰

(5.) Transformative feminism invites people to rethink ethical concerns, making a central place for values which have been lost in modern, technological culture: reciprocity in relationships, diversity, care, harmony and friendship.

(6.) Transformative feminism challenges the patriarchal emphasis in technology, research and analysis, calling for the development and support of research and technologies which work for the sustainable future for the earth.

Transformative Feminism and Pastoral Counseling

If pastoral counseling is to take seriously Clinebell's call to develop more ecological models of care, Schmidt's charge that pastoral care and counseling has relied on dualistic perspectives of psychotherapy, and Ruether's understanding that much of modern theology is rooted in a dualistic and misogynist belief structure, the adoption of holistic models in psychology and theology is necessary. The work of transformative feminism, sensitive to eco-feminist theory, may provide a viable framework to assess theological and psychotherapeutic models. Transformative feminism offers several correctives. First, transformative feminism considers the interrelatedness of the multiple oppressions of race, class, sex, nature, and sexual orientation and it seeks to liberate all forms of life from oppression.⁷¹ Second, relative to pastoral counseling, the

⁷⁰ Warren, 19.

⁷¹ Warren does not include heterosexism among her list of oppressions. I see this as an important omission and include it among the list with sexism, racism, classism,

intrapsychic depth dimension of therapy would be expanded to include the historical, social and ecological concerns which bring people to counseling. Third, transformative feminism rejects domination in any form and offers an egalitarian model of relationship based on mutuality. Pastoral counseling will be stronger as it becomes a clear voice for earth-centered, deep caring-justice in personal, interpersonal, social and environmental spheres.⁷² Deep caring-justice is rooted in embodied relations, actual encounter, and integrated thinking, feeling, and sensing. The actual encounters of living give rise to deep caring-justice. This is contrasted with justice that is dependent on concepts of rights and privileges. Deep caring-justice arises through relationships which call people into integrated thinking, feeling, and sensing in the present. For example, as one is able to understand the practical implications of what it means to bury nuclear waste in salt caverns beneath the earth's surface and feel pain with the awareness of the damage done to human and nonhuman nature, caring, just, creative

and anthropocentrism. Any further reference to transformative feminism will include this addition.

⁷² Carol Gilligan, In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); Lawrence Kohlberg, The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981). The discussion between Gilligan and Kohlberg has influenced my ideas about justice.

actions originating in relational experience, may come forth.⁷³ Such actions express deep caring-justice. Fourth, an ecological understanding of reality which corrects the distortion of dualistic categories and human created hierarchies is offered.

Transformative feminism invites the rethinking of what it means to be a human self of the earth. In proposing that humans are co-members of the earth and at the same time unique, an ecological concept of self is suggested that denies neither the integrity of the earth community nor the human self. Fifth, natural diversity of experience and the spirit of respectful pluralism are affirmed. Counseling that is sensitive to cultural context is essential as is the commitment to work for the empowerment of persons, and the growth of organic community. Sixth, the call to use appropriate technology invites pastoral counselors to look seriously at the physical places of their work with regard to ecological viability. Seventh, the transformative feminist tenant that ethical considerations should include values of reciprocity, care, non-hierarchical decision making, and conflict resolution suggests a pastoral ethic of reconciliation and nonviolence. Finally, the work of transformative feminism will be enhanced through theological reflection. An understanding of the holy as that which is known in healing, reciprocal, caring, just, creative encounters, as that which

⁷³ The United States Federal Government is actively developing the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (W.I.P.P.) near Carlsbad, New Mexico. After extensive public protest which has revealed many issues about safety, the low and medium level radioactive waste of the Los Alamos research labs will be lowered into salt caverns deep below the earth's surface as early as July 1990. The potential lethality of this program is enormous.

calls women and men to authentic, integrated selfhood, right relations and harmonious dwelling, is important to the transformative feminist task.⁷⁴

I believe reconciliation is the central task of pastoral work in this era. The framework which transformative feminism offers can help people begin to see self-in-context and to integrate that which has been split and separated. Reconciliation with self, other, the holy, and the earth can happen as humans become aware of the whole of experience and awaken to the elegance of simple meeting.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," Poetry, Language, and Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 145-161. Heidegger uses the term "dwelling" to describe the experience of being in harmonious relationship with the earth, the sky, and the Gods. An expanded explanation of dwelling is offered in Chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1970). My use of "meeting" comes from Buber's work on the ontological primacy of relationship, and his belief that the only holy worth having is that which is present in "the between," in the here and now of life authentically lived in organic community.

CHAPTER 2

Feminist Theology:

Carter Heyward and Rosemary Radford Ruether

Traditional Theology in Crisis

Sharon Welch suggests there are two fundamental crises facing Christian theology, one conceptual, one moral.¹ The former includes "a critique both of the adequacy of theological method and the reality of faith's referent."² Methodological, symbolic, and linguistic considerations and questions about God's existence belong in this category. The second crisis, the question of the moral adequacy of the Christian faith, Welch believes to be the more important of the two. She asks if Christian faith is in itself ideological and a "dangerous mask for relations of domination."³ Referring to the work of Paul Johnson, Welch suggests that the feminist and the Marxist critiques of Christian faith should be taken seriously by people of faith.

These critiques, the feminist and the Marxist, shatter the complacency of faith. They remind us that the history of Christianity and its impact on society is checkered at best. The atrocities of the Inquisition, the witchburnings, the

¹ Sharon D. Welch, Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis, 1985), 1.

² Welch, 2.

³ Welch, 3

Crusades, the justification of imperialism and colonialism, the perpetuation of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, the silence of most churches in the face of the horrors of war and the Nazi holocaust should cause even the most committed Christian to question the truth of Christianity's claims. Does Christian faith actually have as a referent, given the atrocity of Christian complicity with injustice and hatred throughout the centuries, a God who is both loving and just?⁴

The denigration of the earth should be added to the list of atrocities with which Christianity is closely associated.⁵ According to Welch, Christian faith is challenged with regard to its intellectual capacity and articulation, but more importantly with regard to its moral adequacy in the history of the world. Christian feminists are asking for accountability and truth from the church, so that the church may come to practice love and justice in the present.

Ruether notes that "Religious traditions fall into crisis when the received interpretations of the redemptive paradigms contradict experience in significant ways."⁶ The crisis is amplified when the institutions which carry and teach the tradition are perceived as corrupt and not based on truth. A final crisis is known when the entirety of one's religious heritage appears to be corrupt.⁷ In the face of this corruption Ruether suggests that it is important to look

⁴ Welch, 4; Paul Johnson, A History of Christianity (New York: Atheneum, 1979).

⁵ H. Paul Santmire, The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Lynne White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Science 155 (1967) : 1203-1207.

⁶ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 16.

⁷ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 17.

back to the experience that was known as truth before the corruption altered the understanding and practice of truth.

To look back to some original base of meaning and truth before corruption is to know that truth is more basic than falsehood and hence able, ultimately, to root out falsehood in a new future that is dawning in contemporary experience. . . . By finding an alternative historical community and tradition more deeply rooted than those that have become corrupted one can feel sure that in criticizing the dominant tradition one is not just subjectively criticizing the dominant tradition but is, rather touching a deeper bedrock of authentic Being upon which to ground the self.⁸

For those who have stayed within the church writers in feminist theology ask Christians to find that "deeper bedrock of authentic Being" and the experience of truth prior to corruption.

Ruether writes that human experience is the root of all theological reflection.⁹ What we have come to believe are objective sources of theology, Scripture and tradition, are in fact based on human experience.¹⁰ Experience is an "interacting dialectic" inclusive of experiences of the self, the holy, the community, and the entirety of the world. Symbols are understood to be true to the extent that they accurately reflect experience. A symbol dies if it does not authentically represent experience. If it is to be a living symbol representative of living experience it must be changed.¹¹

⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 18.

⁹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 12.

¹⁰ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 12.

¹¹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 12.

Feminist theology exposes traditional theological presuppositions and symbols which are based on the exclusive experience of males, cutting off the experience of one half of the species in theological reflection. Feminist theology is a corrective for this bias, offering theological reflection and symbols which are based on women's experience.

Rita Nakashima Brock writes that in looking directly at the suffering in the world, the social gospel, liberation, black, and feminist movements have brought changes to the church while challenging the church to examine its self understanding and the truth of its practice.¹²

They reject the delayed promise of heaven and seek to know the meaning of the resurrection as a lived reality rather than a faint hope. Those who suffer have proclaimed their own basis for faith, a basis that rejects passive piety. Sacrificing the present to future goals is no longer the hallmark of authentic Christian faith.¹³

The crisis of traditional theology reflects the experience of those who have suffered injustice, who no longer experience the symbols and tradition of the church as authentic and true, and who call for a new redemptive order on this earth in the present.

Central to feminist theology is the claim of, and promotion of, the full humanity of women.¹⁴ In making the claim of full humanity, women are called to an inclusiveness of gender, race, and class not

¹² Rita Nakashima Brock, Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power (New York: Crossroad, 1988), xi.

¹³ Brock, xi.

¹⁴ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 19.

yet realized. Ruether is adamant about women rejecting any form of androcentrism or anthropocentrism which diminishes the existence of any being. The liberation of women cannot be at the expense of men or other species, and it can only be fully known when all of life is affirmed and respected. For this to happen male-centered and human-centered values and structures must be replaced. She writes that feminist theology asks people to envisage a way of relating that is not based on hierarchical structures separating one from another, but is a way of relating that recognizes value, affirms diversity, and recognizes individual differences. Feminist theology is rooted in an understanding of mutuality that supports difference in the context of the whole.¹⁵

Beverly Harrison writes that "the locus of feminist theology is a broad-based and global rising of women."¹⁶ It is not confined to a small malcontent group of women in Western culture, but includes women from around the world: North American Indian, African, Asian, Indian, Hispanic. Feminist theology has risen out of women beginning to take seriously their own experiences of self and the experiences of other women. Harrison notes that feminist theology has both deconstructive and constructive components. The deconstructive work has uncovered the male-gender symbolism in religious traditions which exclusively associate the holy with the

¹⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 20.

¹⁶ Beverly Wildung Harrison, "Restoring the Tapestry of Life: The Vocation of Feminist Theology," Drew Gateway 54, no. 1 (1983): 40.

masculine.¹⁷ Feminist efforts have continued to point out the marginalization of women and the continual association of women with weakness and triviality. Further, feminist theology has pointed to the interrelatedness of the oppressions of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and nature.¹⁸

The constructive efforts of feminist theologians have been multifaceted. Referring to the work of Nelle Morton, Harrison points to the radical nature of the feminist project.

The deepest challenge of feminist theology rests in recognizing that our entire conceptual heritage must be reoriented so that we come to feminist theology, literally, as "a new way of seeing." Long ago, Nelle Morton reminded us of what all feminist theologians . . . have come to treat as axiomatic--that the western, Christian tradition, and in fact our whole western sense of reality, is blinded fundamentally by ruptures or dualisms that have made it impossible for us to recover a wholistic and healing relationship to all that is.¹⁹

In a similar tone Carter Heyward writes about the transformative nature of the feminist vision and project.²⁰ Heyward writes that in the early 1970s she would have focused on the feminist project of women as being the realization and acceptance

¹⁷ Harrison, "Restoring the Tapestry of Life," 41.

¹⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk.

¹⁹ Harrison, "Restoring the Tapestry of Life," 42; Nelle Morton, "Toward A Whole Theology: A Working Paper," Task Force on Women, World Council of Churches, n.d., 1.

²⁰ Carter Heyward, "Feminist Theology: The Early Task and Beyond," Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation (1984; reprint, New York: Pilgrim, 1984), 7.

of their own power. In the late 1980s her understanding of feminism takes on a broader and more radical nature. While she continues to be concerned with women's empowerment, she sees the work of feminism and feminist theology, as nothing short of the transformation of the basic premises about nature and culture. The constructive work of feminist theology concerns healing the ruptures of dualistic perception and recovering a holistic relationship to human and nonhuman nature. The multiple articulations of feminist theology offers a diversity of ideas and experience, creating a rich soil in which this constructive work has rooted.

The Feminist Theology of Carter Heyward
and Rosemary Radford Ruether

The work of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Carter Heyward is central to this dissertation because of their focus on the dissolution of dualisms, justice rising from relationship and deep caring, the active presence of the holy in everyday life, and their emphasis on embodiment and mutuality. There are women outside of the church who are working with many of the same categories in very creative ways. Ruether's and Heyward's work is important because of the revolutionary ways they point while remaining in the church. While no one can claim to speak for or to all people, Ruether's and Heyward's work offers creative possibilities to people who live within the conceptual framework and actual body of the church. Because of their deep understanding of the interrelatedness of the multiple oppressions of racism, sexism, classism,

anthropocentrism, and heterosexism, their work offers hope for deep regeneration and healing.

God

Heyward notes that traditional Christian theologies have encouraged images of a God who exists apart from the human world.²¹ God has largely been characterized as separate, autonomous, and wholly other, while humans are estranged, lonely, and divided. Such an account removes both God and humans from earthly lived existence.

Our underlying assumption has been that human bonding in the world is less good than if "He" is to be "God." That is, in order to be wholly other than "His" creatures, yet a deity in whose image we are made, "God" requires that we--like "Him"--be set above the world, apart from our own humanity, over and against each other. In such a schema, "redemption" is God's act of lifting us above ourselves, a process of divine deliverance from the human condition.²²

Heyward believes the above description of God is a patriarchal interpretation. She understands and experiences God very differently, suggesting radical relationship as a truer description of humanness and God's presence.

The experience of relation is fundamental and constitutive of human being; that it is good and powerful; and that it is only within this experience--as it is happening here and now--that we may realize that the power in relation is God.²³

²¹ Isabel Carter Heyward, The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation (New York: University Press of America, 1982), 1.

²² Heyward, The Redemption of God, 1.

²³ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 1.

Heyward suggests that love of neighbor actualized in right relation and justice are the fruits of understanding God as the "power in relation."

I believe that God is our power in relation to each other, all humanity, and creation itself. God is creative power, that which effects justice--right relation--in history. God is the bond which connects us in such a way that each of us is em-powered to grow, work, play, love and be loved. . . . God . . . is also our immediate re-source of power: that from which we draw power to realize actively who we are in relation.²⁴

In Heyward's presentation God is known in relationship. God is not set apart from the world, but instead, is fully known in the embodied world. Divine love is known through the actual love of others in this lifetime. Divine power is made known and available in acts of love and justice. Heyward writes that "making justice is our act of making God incarnate in the world."²⁵ God is wholly, intimately, creatively, and relationally embodied in the world through people making right relation. Heyward writes about her belief in such a God.

I believe that God is with us in the world, as a moving spirit, which creates, liberates, and blesses the world. God's relation to us creates us as relational characters: we are created in relation, immediately and intimately bound to "something" that is neither our possession as individuals nor our capacity apart from others. The "something" is the power we experience in relation to parents, plants, animals, air, food, and even to our selves--that is, in our ability to

²⁴ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 6.

²⁵ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 9.

know what "our selves" need or want (for example, to eat, cry, speak, touch, walk. . . .²⁶

The "something" about which Heyward writes is experienced as we authentically encounter ourselves and others, human and nonhuman. Only in relation is "something" experienced and made known.

God is also changed by God's relation with the world. Heyward suggests that God is changed in ways well beyond the metaphorical. God is touched in very real ways.

With us, by us, through us, God lives, God becomes, God changes, God speaks, God acts, God suffers and God dies in the world. To say that God dies is not to speak "merely" metaphorically. It is to suggest, for example, that in the death of each of six million Jews, a creating, liberating, and sanctifying presence was, in fact, exterminated from the world. Destroyed. Killed. Literally--actually, physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually--removed from the world--forever.²⁷

In our actual relations with each other, with the earth, God lives and God dies.

Ruether suggests that traditional understandings and images of the holy are no longer useful as they have risen from social relationships which are characterized by hierarchy and domination.²⁸ Ruether uses the term God/ess, representing both masculine and

²⁶ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 8.

²⁷ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 9.

²⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 69. Ruether writes that "when discussing fuller divinity to which this theology points, I use the term God/ess, a written symbol intended to combine both the masculine and feminine forms of the word for the divine while preserving the Judeo-Christian affirmation that divinity is one. . . . one might prefer a more evocative term, such as Holy One or Holy Wisdom." Sexism and God-Talk, 46.

feminine, to denote a single divinity. God/ess is that which liberates the oppressed and calls all into a community of equality. God/ess is "Matrix . . . source and ground of our being."²⁹ Ruether suggests that patriarchal theologies of hope or liberation, theologies of Exodus, which identify the source of creation and being with current social systems, separate spirit and nature. In these models being, matter, and nature are understood to be evil, while spirit and transcendence are associated with the holy. Transcendent liberation is associated with the flight of spirit away from matter into new possibilities. The dynamic tension between God/ess as primal matrix and source of new possibilities is lost. The identification of matter, nature, and being with mother makes such patriarchal theology hostile to women as symbols of all that restricts men from freedom. "God/ess as Matrix is thought of as 'static' immanence."³⁰

Ruether writes that feminist theology must reject any form of dualism which separates nature and spirit. The image of "mother-matter-matrix" as the ontological foundation of existence and unchanging immanence, and the concept of transcendent spirit separate from the world of the body and nature, must be transformed.³¹ Instead, feminist theology must support the God

²⁹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 71.

³⁰ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 70.

³¹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 70.

known in "being-new being" who is both primal matrix and the source of new possibilities.

The God/ess who is the foundation (at one and the same time) of our being and our new being embraces both the roots of the material substratum of our existence (matter) and also the endlessly new creative potential (spirit). The God/ess who is the foundation of our being-new being does not lead us back to a stifled, dependent self or uproot us in a spirit-trip outside the earth. . . . It leads us to the converted center, the harmonization of self and body, self and other, self and world.³²

God/ess works to liberate people from relationships and structures of injustice in presenting new possibilities of harmony and grounding in the matrix. In the encounter with God/ess people encounter their authentic selves beyond alienation and fragmentation. God/ess is experienced through the actual encounters of healing relationships and reconciliation with the body, with other people, and with nonhuman nature.

Nature

In Chapter 1 it was noted that the Christian separation of spirit and body creates a hierarchy of value where the body is devalued and set in opposition to spirit. As nonhuman nature is associated with the body it is placed lower in the hierarchy. In both Heyward's and Ruether's work the dissolution of this dualism is central.

Heyward offers an understanding of nature that is holistic and nonhierarchical, where the human and the nonhuman are threads of a single holy cloth. Heyward's emphasis on God as the power made

³² Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 71.

known in embodied relationship affirms the material world as holy. She writes that evil rises out of the denigration of the body.

All evil, that is, the malicious violation of creation itself--human beings, plants, animals, air, water--seems rooted in our failure to know and to take seriously the holiness of the body.³³

In traditional theology the realm of spirit and transcendence is believed to be more significant than the embodied life. Heyward writes that God cannot be contrasted with the physical body, the human body, the body of humanity, or the body of creation. Just as God "becomes" in the act of relation, there is no humanity apart from relation, there is no creation apart from relation, and nothing can live outside of the intimately related whole of existence.

Each of us as a body is a member of a larger body--the human body, human family, humanity itself--alongside and with other creatures, the "four-leggeds" and "wingeds" who join us, the "two-leggeds," at the banquet of life.³⁴

In Heyward's understanding of nature, the human and nonhuman live in balance. Human bodies are not discrete and separate from nonhuman nature, but are part of the same larger context. All participate in "the banquet of life."

An adequate understanding of the denigration of nature includes a discussion of the bifurcation of culture and nature and the dominated labors of women in the domestic sphere. Referring to Sherry Ortner's work Ruether notes that woman and nature are

³³ Carter Heyward, "Liberating the Body," Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation (1984; reprint, New York: Pilgrim, 1984), 139.

³⁴ Carter Heyward, "Liberating the Body," 142.

devalued because of the social belief that culture is of higher value than nature.³⁵ Men's lives are understood to be within the realm of culture while women are understood to be closer to the realm of nature, and are therefore, of less value. Addressing the basis for the association of women with nature Ruether suggests a twofold explanation.

This is due both to woman's physiological investment in the biological processes that reproduce the species rather than in processes that enhance her as an individual and to the ability of male collective power to extend women's physiological role into social roles confined to child nurture and domestic labor.³⁶

Within this frame woman's physiological processes are looked upon as dirty and polluting and woman's social roles are viewed as inferior to those of men. The daily chores of maintaining home and family are relegated to the lower, less valued realms of human work, while the cultural activities outside of the home are more highly valued. Woman and nature are low on the hierarchical ladder relative to man and culture. Both woman and nature are under patriarchal control and domination. The necessary work of living: raising food, cooking, cleaning, caring for the sick and aged, and raising children, are not understood to be of value in either the commercial or religious spheres.

³⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 72. Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" Woman, Culture and Society eds. M.Z. Rosaldo, and L. Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 67-87.

³⁶ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 72.

The hierarchy of being, and the subsequent devaluation and domination of woman and nature has roots in Hebrew, Platonic, and Christian traditions (please see Chapter 1, Christian Framework).³⁷ Ruether suggests that an ecological-feminist theology of nature must address the very foundation of the Christian tradition which is based on a hierarchy of being and command. In a feminist framework the holy is not set apart from the earth. The holy, God/ess, "is neither stifling immanence nor rootless transcendence." The holy is the ground of "being-new being."³⁸ The dualistic splitting of spirit and matter is addressed in the formulation that matter and spirit are are not separate, but are different manifestations of the same energy.

Relying on the work of Teilhard de Chardin, Ruether suggests the universe is a being who was born, lives, and will die.³⁹ The energy of matter changes and moves toward increasing orders of complexity and centralization. During the span of natural-historical time critical points of transformation are known. New forms emerge and others die. While the new is not yet actualized its potential remains hidden in the present, thus, "Nature contains transcendence and freedom, as well as necessity."⁴⁰ The critical points represent

³⁷ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 75-82.

³⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 85.

³⁹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 86. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper, 1959), 53-74.

⁴⁰ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 86.

qualitative changes: mineral to plant, plant to animal, non-sentient to sentient. Human consciousness is a unique form of energy which is contiguous with, not set against, nonhuman nature. Human consciousness allows people to respond to the "thou" of the life energy, which is uniquely manifested in every being.⁴¹ Ruether writes about the necessity of the human response to nonhuman nature.

We must respond to a "thou-ness" in all beings. This is not romanticism or an anthropomorphic animism. . . . The spirit in plants or animals is not anthropomorphic but biomorphic to its own forms of life. We respond not just as "I to it," but as "I to thou," to the spirit, the life energy that lies in every being in its own form of existence.⁴²

Within this framework there is a radical interdependency among different forms of life.⁴³ While the more complex forms of life have freedoms that the less complex forms of life do not have, the more complex forms are dependent on the less complex forms for their very existence. Humans need air, water, the plants and the microbe community of the soil for survival. The life processes of the ecological community are extremely complex and intimately interrelated. Mike Samuels and Hal Zina Bennett describe the importance and complexity of these interrelationships using the example of an African acacia plant.

⁴¹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 87. Ruether's use of "I-Thou" is in keeping with Buber's original usage, though Ruether does not acknowledge Buber in Sexism and God-Talk.

⁴² Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 87.

⁴³ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 87.

Environmental studies reveal that this plant has a very special purpose in life. It serves as a border marker for other species of plants and animals that grow on the savannahs outside the desert. . . . wherever this plant has been decimated the desert has expanded its borders, turning once grassy acres into barren wastelands.⁴⁴

The authors go on to note that this particular acacia is close to extinction and there are no known plants that function in the same way. The implications of this seemingly simple relationship are vast. Drought, famine, destruction of range and grassland animals and the breakdown of human community rise from the breakdown of the relationship between humans and the land. The changes to the African savannahs will have long range effects on the earth well beyond one or two generations and the passing of the acacia. The effects are vast and humanly unpredictable. The complexity and intimacy of ecological processes cannot be overstated. Every action taken has local and global implications, many of which cannot be foreseen.

Ruether suggests the appropriate human relationship to the nonhuman world is "caretaker and cultivator of the welfare of the whole ecological community."⁴⁵ Human intelligence should not be used to dominate, to destroy, or to utilize the nonhuman world for human purposes, but to create new ways of living harmoniously and in balance. To do this humans will have to "convert our intelligence

⁴⁴ Mike Samuels, and Hal Zina Bennett, Well Body. Well Earth: The Sierra Club Environmental Health Sourcebook (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1983), 61-62. The authors do not make a value claim for savannah over desert, only an observation that the deserts extend into savannah regions when the acacia is destroyed.

⁴⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 88.

to the earth."⁴⁶ Through such conversion humans gain true self-identity and learn their appropriate place with nonhuman nature. Humans can use the whole of their capacities to restore ecological integrity. The choices are really few, either humans learn who they are in the context of the ecological community and act appropriately, or life as humans know it will die.

A "conversion to the earth" requires fundamental changes in perception, feeling, and thinking. The dualistic separations into higher/lower, bad/good, spirit/matter, must be transformed to an ecological way of understanding. Relying on the work of Sally Springer and George Deutsch, Ruether notes that the biological expression of these patterns is found in the bi-hemisphere functioning of the human brain, where the right side of the brain's relational processes are dominated by the left side's more developed rational, linear, and reductionistic processes.⁴⁷ To the extent that the social and cultural emphasis has been on left hemisphere type functioning and men have had greater opportunities to develop these capacities, women and other oppressed peoples have not been given the opportunities to develop their rational, linear capabilities. At the same time, men have not been encouraged to develop the relational, affective aspects of themselves. Thus, human intelligence lacks the integration of affective and rational, linear and creative, specific and contextual. Reliance on either modality is

⁴⁶ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 88.

⁴⁷ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 89. Sally P. Springer and Georg Deutsch, Left Brain, Right Brain (San Francisco: Freeman, 1981), 121-130.

ultimately oppositional to an ecological way of understanding. Ecological intelligence requires the integration of these aspects in such ways that humans are able to think, feel and sense in qualitatively different ways.

While "conversion to the earth" is necessary for the survival of life, it is not separate from human relationships with each other.⁴⁸ Ecological thinking must be rooted in an ethic of justice which expresses the relationship between the domination and oppression of nature and human relationships of oppression and exploitation. Acts which benefit a dominant few at the expense of the integrity of the whole community must be identified, addressed and changed. Ecological intelligence and the healing of the earth require justice.

Humanity

A central concept in Christian theology is the imago dei, the image of god. According to the Christian tradition, humans are created in the image of God. While the original oneness and wholeness of humanity with God has given way to a sinful and fallen state, there once existed an earlier relationship with God that was untainted. Ruether notes that the question as to how the image of God and fallen humanity bears upon issues of gender is central to the feminist task.⁴⁹

Christianity has affirmed that both males and females are created in the image of God. Yet, to the extent that the spirit/matter dualism has permeated Christianity, woman has been

⁴⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 91.

⁴⁹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 93.

understood to be of less value and to be more distant from the image of God. Sin has been associated with the body and with death, that which keeps people from full participation in God. As woman is identified with the body she is identified with sin and all that keeps man from purity and oneness with God.⁵⁰ Within this framework, woman is split into images of the virgin and the whore. Man projects his feared and repressed aspects onto woman who becomes the carrier of the dark and unholy, or she is made into the perfect virgin, free of that which is associated with the body.⁵¹ To the extent that woman believes and identifies with those projections she loses authentic self, while the one who projects loses the capacity to experience and understand that which he has denied in himself and assigned to woman. Both remain partial and unintegrated beings. Feminist theologians point to the necessity of developing an anthropology which is based on equality and is sensitive to the structures of consciousness and relations of power which oppress women, keeping both men and women partial. A feminist anthropology addresses issues of equality, gender development, and the spirit/matter dualism.

Heyward's theology of embodiment suggests that becoming human is to become like God in passionate relationship.⁵² Authentic being, for woman and man, exists in authentic and right relationship.

⁵⁰ Susan Griffin, Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 8-80.

⁵¹ Susan Griffin, Pornography and Silence.

⁵² Heyward, The Redemption of God, 151.

Referring to the experiences of Elie Wiesel in the concentration camps of Germany during World War II, Heyward relates the extinction of the self with the extinction of passion known in the "power of relation."⁵³ Human selves exist only to the extent that people live lives of passion and insist on just relations. Heyward writes that "to be human is to know good and evil and to realize one's power to effect either," while the task of becoming human is living with passion and the power to affect the world.⁵⁴ To claim "power in relation" and to live in passion, to affect change, is to become human. In becoming human, people become co-creators with God in the world.⁵⁵

Heyward highlights the relationship between human passion and justice.

Justice is the fruit of human passion, deep love that is willing to bear up fear and tension and uncertainty in relation to people, issues and possibilities known and unknown. Our passion enables us to act together rather than separately; co-operatively rather than competitively; on the basis of an original bonding rather than on the assumption of a dualistic gap between us, and between our experiences of what is real and what is ideal. . . .⁵⁶

⁵³ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 151; Elie Wiesel, The Accident (New York; Avon, 1961; Wiesel, Dawn (New York: Avon, 1960); Wiesel, Night (New York: Avon, 1969); Wiesel, The Town Beyond the Wall (New York: Avon, 1964).

⁵⁴ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 152.

⁵⁵ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 154.

⁵⁶ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 136.

Human life, rooted in justice, is cooperative and based on mutuality. Life lived in passion, in the image of God, is based on the ontological priority of mutual relationship.

After reviewing some of the strengths and weaknesses of the major forms of feminism relative to the development of a feminist anthropology, Ruether suggests that equal access to education, employment, and political rights does not adequately address the deepest layers of woman's marginalization in society.⁵⁷ While equality assures access, the ways women and men function in the public sphere must also be addressed. If women participate equally in a system that is fundamentally corrupt and oppressive, neither justice or ecological transformation have been served. As Ynestra King has pointed out, though women are beginning to taste the pie, the pie is rotten to the core.⁵⁸ Is it good for anyone to eat rotten pie? A feminist anthropology must address this question and critically examine the social structures which so powerfully influence the identities and potentials of both women and men.

Distinguishing between the biological and social determinants of gender is important to this discussion. Ruether insists that there is no biological basis for assigning certain qualities of human character to woman or man.⁵⁹ For example, man does not have a greater biological capacity for reasoned thought than woman, nor

⁵⁷ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 109.

⁵⁸ Ynestra King, "Healing the Wounds."

⁵⁹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 111.

does woman have a greater innate capacity for empathy and intuition.

Maleness and femaleness exist as reproductive role specialization. There is no necessary (biological) connection between reproductive complementarity and either psychological or social role differentiation. These are the work of culture and socialization, not of "nature".⁶⁰

While reproductive role specialization points to physical differences, men and women have equivalent personhood. Difference and equivalency coexist in a feminist understanding of humanity. Both men and women have the capacity for wholeness and integrity of character. Both men and women can heal into the imago dei. The deep integration of the affective, the rational, and the sensual suggests a qualitative change in character and not simply a reorganization and increased development of different aspects of the human personality. It becomes the source of a different way of experiencing, understanding, and acting in the world.

Ruether notes that recovery of wholeness extends beyond personal healing to the public sphere. Through recovering that which has been projected or repressed, and developing potentials which have been ignored because of socially determined gender expectations, people also transform the ways that these human capacities are expressed in the community. Integrated human beings will bring forth social transformation through their own development and their work in the social sphere; the personal is political. Integration suggests a wholeness of experience where the

⁶⁰ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 111.

relational-thinking person lives a contiguous life in personal-public spheres and does not experience the fragmentation so characteristic of modern western society.⁶¹ Developing the full capacities of humanness requires a reevaluation of how these capacities are used in the world. The development of rational, reductive thinking must be used for cooperative efforts while the development of relational capacities must be in the service of empowerment and not oppression.

The redeemed humanity and society about which Ruether writes is a humanity and society that does not yet exist fully, but is only partially realized. Yet, it is a way of being that is not unfamiliar and is made known through healing encounters with others who have opened themselves to deep healing. Such encounters lead to authentic selfhood and the recognition of the authenticity of other people.⁶²

Good and Evil

In Heyward's theology of "power in relation" and passion, evil is understood to be those acts which destroy relation in human life.⁶³ Referring to the atrocities of the Holocaust Heyward suggests that radical evil, as was present in Germany during the time of the Holocaust, completely destroys the "power in relation." Good lies in

⁶¹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 113.

⁶² Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 115.

⁶³ Heyward, Redemption of God, 154.

the human choice to live in passion, to use the "power in relation" to make justice in the world.

Humans turn from good, from "power in relation," out of fear of bearing the passion of living in relation. In fear humans choose the safer route, the comfortable, the easy, the known, the secure, turning from authentic self, other people, and the holy. Fear has found a home in the deepest parts of the human experience, keeping people from choosing life, from choosing to use the "power in relation" in creative, healing ways in the world.

To the extent humans turn from "power in relation" and toward the illusory safety of a fearful life, evil is served. In this turning the subtle and hidden is forsaken for the known. Ambiguity is feared and assurance is sought at all costs.⁶⁴ Heyward notes that it is within ambiguity that mystery lies. In turning from ambiguity humans lose mystery.

But in our fear we do evil. Seeking solutions to mystery; attempting to control growth and change; trying to impose order upon spontaneity, pluralism, choices, and differences, we are willing to destroy relationality in its enigmatic wonder. We are willing to negate the creative basis of human experience. We are willing to kill humanity in order to protect humanity from itself. We are willing to put God to death in order to cling to a deity whom we create in the image of our violent malaise.⁶⁵

Fear of "power in relation" leads to acts which constrict, control, and rigidify human experience, virtually destroying creativity and

⁶⁴ Heyward, Redemption of God, 155.

⁶⁵ Heyward, Redemption of God, 156.

authentic encounter. Humans always have the choice, to choose to use "power in relation" or to abdicate that power. The choice belongs to every individual, not with God. In choosing to bear a life of passion, choosing "power in relation" to a life of fear, of control, and of safety, evil is addressed and God is born in the world, in acts of love and justice.

Choosing "power in relation" requires an acceptance of the complexity of experience. No choice can be purely good, for the life of passion is lived on the narrow ridge between good and evil, where ambiguity slowly, though not always, gives way to clarity of vision and action.⁶⁶ Through living with ambiguity people learn to live in a more holistic way. In a holistic framework what may seem to be oppositional is in fact interrelated. Nothing is final, pure, or unchanging. For example, a white woman may understand that she is oppressed by misogynist social systems and relationships of injustice and at the same time see that she is an oppressor of people of color through her socially privileged position as a white person. Truth for her must include both understandings. Creative action will rise out of the experience of this truth, not the premature grasping of either aspect. Learning to see individual complicity in evil while working for good in the world is a life lived on the narrow ridge. It is life lived with passion. It is life lived.

Ruether writes that evil rises out of the distortion and corruption of the I-Thou relationship into good/evil and

⁶⁶ Buber, I and Thou. Buber uses the term "narrow ridge" in referring to the life of dialogue.

superior/inferior dualisms.⁶⁷ Through the distortion of the natural dialectics of existence dualistic relationships of domination and oppression arise; man is thought to be superior and good, woman is thought to be inferior and evil, culture is thought to be superior and good, nature is thought to be inferior and evil. The evil of distorted relationship is not confined to the individual but extends to the public domain in the political, social, and economic spheres. Structures of injustice oppress those who are thought to be lower in the hierarchy: women, people of color, children and nonhuman nature.

The evil of sexism and the distortion of relationship, affects the consciousness of both men and women. Both are damaged in significant ways. The projection onto woman of all that is feared and unwanted by man limits a man's capacity to come into his full humanity as he does not have to develop or integrate that which is projected.⁶⁸ A man's immersion in the public sphere brings with it expectations which adversely affect his health and well being. Women are damaged in not being given the opportunities to develop

⁶⁷ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 161. Ruether's use of the I-Thou relationship as prototype for right relationship among persons is dependent on the work of Martin Buber (see I and Thou). The I-Thou relationship is understood to be one aspect of the dialogical approach, the I-It relationship being the other component. Each aspect represents an orientation and quality of relatedness. Both occur in the "between" and are of the relationship. The I-Thou is characterized by an attitude of presence, respect, immediacy, openness, and reciprocity. The I-It is characterized by purposefulness, objectification of other, and self-consciousness. Both are necessary for existence. The problem with modern society is not that the I-It exists, but that the I-It is dominant, while the I-Thou is lost.

⁶⁸ Please refer to the earlier section Humanity within this chapter for a fuller explanation of the dynamics of objectification and projection.

capacities valued in the public sphere. Through identifying with that which is projected onto her, a woman develops a false sense of self. Ruether notes that while both men and women are damaged, a woman's violation is more serious because of the unequal distribution of power.⁶⁹ A woman cannot survive without access to the public sphere while a man's fragmented selfhood does not necessarily call his very survival into question. While this differential exists, the humanity of both women and men is distorted at deep levels.⁷⁰ Neither knows authentic selfhood or authentic relationship.

While evil is the corruption of the I-Thou relationship, good rises from the conversion to authentic relationship. The process of conversion restores the self, relationship with others, authentic community, and relationship with nonhuman nature.

The good potential of human nature then is to be sought primarily in conversion to relationality. This means a metanoia, or "change of mind," in which the dialectics of human existence are converted from opposites into mutual interdependence. One receives back the gift of community, which has always been there but was denied by polarization: the community of person with person, individually and collectively, across differences of gender, tribe, and culture. One receives back community with nonhuman

⁶⁹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 174.

⁷⁰ While Ruether believes that women are more severely damaged than men, there is a growing literature which suggests that men are differently, but as severely, damaged by patriarchy. For example, the culturally condoned violence that permeates men's lives damages them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Please see the following for further work in this area: Warren Farrel, Why Men Are the Way They Are (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986); Herb Goldberg, The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege (New York: New American Library, 1976).

nature, which has always been there, supporting our reality. Community with God/ess exists precisely in and through this renewed community of creation.⁷¹

Ruether's "renewed community of creation" points to a holistic vision where there is the possibility of integrated human consciousness for women and men and a redeemed social order.

The recognition of the personal and social dimensions of sin point to personal and social dimensions of healing. Redemption of the social order is dependent on the conversion of individuals, while the conversion of individuals is strengthened by the transformation of the social structures of oppression and violence. Ruether notes that all human beings, women and men, are born into sexist social structures which shape development.⁷² Actually, human beings are affected by sexist structures before birth. In a truly relational reality an unborn child is affected by its environment in ways similar to the child who is already born. For example, an unborn fetus experiences the environment through the mother and the mother's relationships with the world. If the mother is a victim of violence, the fetus will have real experiences that affect its prenatal reality. After birth the child inherits social, economic, and political structures which will continue to have effects on her/his development.⁷³ For example, the world's soils are depleted

⁷¹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 163.

⁷² Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 182.

⁷³ The theorists of the Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies at Wellesley College write convincingly about the implications of socially determined developmental patterns which are different for female and male children.

because of political-economic systems which believe soil is used for short term gain and is of little worth beyond the monetary dimension and its use to humans alone. Children grow without the vitamin rich foods they need for health because generations before them did not have a holistic understanding of interdependence and respect for the organic reality of life. Unborn children, growing children, teenagers, adults, and old people are impacted by the social and environmental fallout of sexism. No one is free of sexism. Sexism affects the cells of the body, it affects the ways humans are born, how they raise food, how they love, worship, and die. Because humans are able to make decisions and are responsible for the development and continuation of sexist structures of oppression, humans can choose to not cooperate with these structures. Because humans are responsible humans can choose new patterns of living.

We can unmask sexism as sin. We can disaffiliate with it. We can begin to shape at least our personal identity and then our more immediate relationships with others in a new way.⁷⁴

In the choice, in the acts of disaffiliation by women and men, people are changed and the larger social system is changed.

The ways in which women and men change and remove themselves from the evil of sexism are different. The crippling of women and men is different, therefore the processes of healing are different. Women gain authentic selfhood in letting go of socially defined roles and behaviors. A woman comes begins to change when she learns about her real needs and desires. She comes into her

⁷⁴ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 182.

power when she refuses to go on with the play as usual and begins to look at the ideological, social, political, and economic shackles which have kept her from living as a full person. She begins to see how other women are marginalized and oppressed. She comes into power when she takes responsibility for her life, for her feelings, her thoughts, her desires, her choices and her actions in the present. Opening to her life opens her to a qualitatively different consciousness and the possibility of authentic community with other women and with men. Ruether notes that in the early stages of the conversion experience women may seek only the community of other women. The anger of violation may be too great to allow for community with men during this time. Only through the full experience of anger and alienation can women open to community with men.⁷⁵ Again, a qualitatively different state of consciousness is born, allowing for the possibility of a redeemed social structure.

Ruether suggests that the primary tasks before men who disaffiliate from sexist structures have to do with their seeing and changing the ways in which they participate in oppression.⁷⁶ This will entail a recognition of the fear of losing group recognition and group affirmation as a man begins to change the actualities of his life and aligns himself with feminist concerns. Through his choices he may lose power and privilege. A man undergoes conversion when he enters into the work of forming a whole, integrated self, and

⁷⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 188.

⁷⁶ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 191.

when he works with women and other men to create a just and redeemed earth.

Christology

Traditional Christologies have been a problem for feminist women at many levels.⁷⁷ There are two main issues that continue to be discussed. First, feminists ask if women can have a male savior. Because of the ways sex/gender distinctions have been used to oppress women, does Jesus' maleness make it impossible for him to be a liberating figure for women?⁷⁸ The second issue has to do with the church's doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. How can women embrace the figure of Jesus when so much damage has been done in the name of this Christian God?⁷⁹ In different ways both Heyward and Ruether answer these questions by emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, his condemnation of social structures of domination and privilege, Jesus' call for liberation, and the human experience of Christ in the present reality of human relationships of right relation.

In emphasizing Jesus' maleness and his divinity women are excluded. To be like Jesus one must be male. Further, the emphasis on his divinity as Lord and Savior is to disregard the experience of

⁷⁷ Brock, Journeys by Heart; Carter Heyward, "Must 'Jesus Christ' Be a Holy Terror?: Using Christ as a Weapon Against Jews, Women, Gays, and Just About Everybody Else," Our Passion for Justice (1984; reprint, New York: Pilgrim, 1984), 211-221; Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism (1981; reprint, New York: Crossroad, 1983).

⁷⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 116.

⁷⁹ Heyward, "Must 'Jesus Christ' Be a Holy Terror?," 215.

vast numbers of people of the world who are not Christian. Heyward largely focuses her work on the question of Jesus' divinity.

The questions . . . are (1) is something fundamentally damaging to most of humankind in the Christian belief in, and commitment to, Jesus Christ as God's only begotten Son, God the Son himself, our only Lord and Savior; (2) if so, what creative, constructive relations we might have to Jesus, we who are Christians.⁸⁰

Heyward suggests that traditional Christian beliefs and doctrines emphasizing Jesus' divinity are in fact destructive to most of humankind. The church, as a powerful force in the world, too readily aligns itself with the political and economic powers of injustice.

"In the name of Christ," Christian leaders justify and bless capitalism, racism, sexism/heterosexism, and anti-Semitism in societies in which to be "one with Christ," "members of His Body," is necessarily to value, and pay homage to, various assumptions held fast and dearly by those in power and cemented in the foundations of social organization. . . .⁸¹

It also limits salvation to those who claim Jesus Christ as saviour, thus, excluding Jews, Buddhists, Moslems, Hindus, and tribal people from the Kingdom of God. In doing so, Jesus' divinity is made a tool used in the oppression of most of the world's people.

Christianity teaches the value of submissiveness and obedience. People are taught that the church and external figures of authority are to be obeyed, regardless of the circumstances. Suffering is to be endured with patient understanding, as Jesus endured the suffering

⁸⁰ Heyward, "Must 'Jesus Christ' Be a Holy Terror?," 214.

⁸¹ Heyward, "Must 'Jesus Christ' Be a Holy Terror?," 214.

of the cross. Poverty is looked upon as a blessing, a condition not to be changed but from which to learn. Heyward suggests that the foundation of these teachings is the image of Jesus Christ who willingly suffered at the hands of his father.⁸² To the extent that people in positions of power believe in this image of divinity, Jesus is used to justify relations of privilege and dominance. Those who are oppressed are taught to look to Jesus as divine and to see Jesus' obedience, poverty, and submissiveness as qualities to be emulated in their own lives. In these ways the church's teachings of Jesus' divinity violates most peoples of the world and do not represent appropriate and true relationship of God and humanity.⁸³

If Jesus is to have any meaning for Christians he must be understood in a different way than he has been presented through Scripture and the teachings of the church. Heyward points to the importance of re-imaging Jesus.⁸⁴ The act of imaging is an exploration of the reality of experience and the expression of the relation between oneself and what one encounters. Imaging is a creative expression of the relationship between oneself and the world. "To image is to portray reality as relational. . . . To image is to find a way of expressing relation."⁸⁵ To re-image Jesus is to release old images of who Jesus was and how Jesus is related to

⁸² Heyward, "Must 'Jesus Christ' Be a Holy Terror?," 214.

⁸³ Heyward, "Must 'Jesus Christ' Be a Holy Terror?," 217.

⁸⁴ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 30.

⁸⁵ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 26.

human lives. To re-image Jesus is to explore what is known about Jesus in the present experiences of life. For Heyward, authentic images of Jesus cannot be found in the preserved past, but in dynamic relations of the present. She invites Christians to re-image Jesus in the context of their own lives.

The most and least we can do if Jesus is to be anything for us--other than an idol which lures us away from the world--is to re-image Jesus on the basis of what we know already about ourselves in relation to the Jesus-figure about whom we have heard, to each other, and to that which we believe to be God. Our christology becomes an image of our relational experience. . . .⁸⁶

Jesus' authenticity is made known through embodied, relational experience in the world.

Heyward's theology of relation, embodiment, and incarnation, emphasizes Jesus' humanity. Jesus' life has meaning to people in the present not because he was divine, but because he was human. God was made known in Jesus' relations, as God is made known in the world now. God is the "power of relation," emerging through authentic relations of mutuality and justice.

Re-image a Jesus whose love for God was his love for humanity; a Jesus whose ethical norm was that to love God is to love our neighbors as ourselves. To love God is to effect right relation, justice, among human beings. . . . To love God is to love humanity so intimately that the realm of God is known to be here and now. . . .⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 30.

⁸⁷ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 49.

Jesus has meaning because he embodies a thorough, loving relationship with God through his love of other human beings.

Heyward distinguishes between exousia, authority which is socially bestowed and sanctioned, and dunamis, authority which is "raw power, self-granted, socially illegitimate . . . unmediated and unlicensed."⁸⁸ Jesus' authority was dunamis. Dunamis is "power in relation." Heyward suggests that Jesus' dunamis led him to a very different worldview than the conventional worldview of his time. The traditional worldview of opposition gave way in Jesus to one of relation. Other people, God, and the world were not seen as other, or object, but as members of a vast web of relationship which encompasses everything. The duality of subject/object gave way to an experience and understanding of co-subjectivity, of radical relationality. Through Jesus' full humanity, in his acts of right relation, he incarnated God. Jesus' actions in the world were totally human and they were totally divine.⁸⁹

Heyward proposes that Jesus' love was characterized by intimacy, immediacy, passion, pain, and anger. "Intimacy refers to a fundamental bonding between people's innermost senses of identity. It is the centering of relation in the depth of human being."⁹⁰ Intimacy can exist across distance and is not dependent on close personal friendship, sexual encounter, or ongoing contact. Intimacy

⁸⁸ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 41.

⁸⁹ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 43.

⁹⁰ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 44.

is an act of recognition; it is to know another and recognize the bond uniting the depths of existence. When people are intimate they reach out, they touch deeply, they heal and are healed. As Jesus knew people, touched them, and healed them through the power of dunamis, the power of relation, people now also can do the same. In healing relation both people are affected. Through faith in the power of relation, in the power of dunamis, people are healed.

Heyward suggests that Jesus was deeply immersed in the present because of his belief that the kingdom of God was on this earth and near. The sense of immediacy from which Jesus acted transformed the relationship between the present and future.

Re-image the relation between future and present, in which the present-present choice, present act-images the future, which is to say that what is coming is "at hand" in what is already. And it is always and only where we are, in time and space, that we are able to make God incarnate.⁹¹

In the lived life of the present lies the future. The choices that people make in the present create the future. To the extent that people choose to open to God in the world through right relation in the present, the future is served. Allowing oneself to be absorbed by memories of the past, or to be distracted by fantasies of the future, removes God from the present. In turning from action in the present people turn from God. The immediacy of Jesus' life was known in his direct and unmediated relationship with God. Knowing God and claiming dunamis immediately gave way to action. Through dunamis,

⁹¹ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 49.

and acting directly in the world, Jesus reflects a radical and direct experience of immediacy.

Heyward expands the traditional understanding of Jesus' passion, the last days of his life leading to the crucifixion, to include the whole of his ministry which was characterized by both joy and suffering. "Power in relation" cannot exist apart from the experience of both pain and joy. To be fully engaged in relationship, to live with passion, is to be open to both the joy of mutuality and the pain of brokenness; it is to be open to life. Jesus' thorough love of humanity and love of God opened him to the full continuum of passionate experience: joy and power in his friendships, the pain of knowing that God is refused, and pain when human relationships are broken.⁹²

Heyward relates Jesus' pain to his expressions of anger. When confronted with people who turn away from God, from "power in relation," Jesus' anger was directly communicated in word and action. Heyward suggests that "Jesus' anger feeds his sense of authority and is fed by his power in relation."⁹³ The interpretation of anger as an expression of the pain of injustice, and a power leading to acts for the restoration of right relation, suggests that anger is an important human experience.

Ruether turns to the synoptic Gospels for a feminist understanding of Jesus, his message, and his work.⁹⁴ Ruether claims

⁹² Heyward, The Redemption of God, 54.

⁹³ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 56.

⁹⁴ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 135.

that in the context of the synoptic Gospels, Jesus speaks for the marginalized and oppressed of society. The Word of God is not used to validate present social structures of oppression, but to expose them and raise up those who have been violated. In Jesus' proclamation that "The last shall be first and first last," Jesus is really pointing to a radical change beyond mere reversal. Jesus is calling forth a new social order where hierarchy and dominance have no place. He is calling forth a new humanity based on service and mutuality. Jesus' power as liberator is in his speaking against the present social order.⁹⁵ His power is in speaking as a human being of a certain historical period.

Ruether claims that the Gospels do not use dualistic categories of masculine and feminine. Instead, many of the women who are depicted in the Gospels are representatives of marginalized and oppressed social groups.

The protest of the Gospels is directed at the concrete sociological realities in which maleness and femaleness are elements, along with class, ethnicity, religious office, and law, that define the network of social status.⁹⁶

Jesus denounces relationships of status and dominance and systems of privilege. Jesus' power is not in his sex or gender, but in the truth of his words and actions on behalf of the dispossessed.

Ruether suggests that "the maleness of Jesus has no ultimate

⁹⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 137.

⁹⁶ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 137.

significance."⁹⁷ His maleness is only symbolically significant in a patriarchal society of privilege. Jesus, as the Christ, is liberator calling forth a redeemed and just order.

In this sense Jesus as the Christ, the representative of liberated humanity and the liberating Word of God, manifests the kenosis of patriarchy, the announcement of the new humanity through a lifestyle that discards hierarchical caste privilege and speaks on behalf of the lowly. . . . The femaleness of the social and religiously outcast who respond to him has social symbolic significance as a witness against the same idolatrous system of patriarchal privilege. Jesus . . . and the marginalized women and men who respond to him represent the overthrow of the present world system and the sign of a new age in which God's will is done on earth.⁹⁸

The renewed community of women and men represents a radical transformation of consciousness and a turning over of the social order. Structures based on domination and privilege are replaced with social relations based on equality and justice, and those who have been marginalized and oppressed are liberated to the possibilities of new life. Jesus is both redeemed and redeemer, as those who are liberated are both redeemed and redeemer for other people. Jesus' power does not have meaning in a distant historical point in time, but in the actual lived lives of liberated and oppressed people helping each other move toward new humanity. Christ lives now, within and among people.

⁹⁷ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 137.

⁹⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 137.

Eschatology

Traditional Christian teachings have encouraged people to believe that while suffering and injustice may dominate their lives in the present, after death they will be relieved in heaven. God's realm has been taught to be apart from the historical events of this world. Having lived a righteous life individuals can look forward to personal immortality in the beyond.

Heyward speaks to the topic of eschatology in addressing the issues of redemption and history.⁹⁹ She notes that traditional understandings of redemption are based on an image of God that is outside of history. The hierarchical structure which sets heaven above earth, spirit above the body, and God above creation, leads to an attitude which looks away from this embodied existence for ultimate meaning. In looking to life beyond death, embodied, historical life is trivialized.

In keeping with her theology of incarnation, passion, and "power in relation," Heyward points to the present as the appropriate sphere of focus for redemption. There is no lost paradise in the past, nor is there a future point beyond history where all wrongs will be set right. There is only the present, the here-and-now of embodied life together. Influenced by Elie Wiesel, Heyward suggests that people must dismiss ideas of eschatology and move into the present, to the liberation of people from oppressive power relations and structures of injustice. Redemption does not happen after death, but in the making of right relationship in the present.

⁹⁹ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 130.

The responsible alternative to eschatological and protological schemes of redemption is that of immediate redemption. We seek to make right relation between and among ourselves here and now. Our power in relation compels us to take and eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and to thereby know that the power in relation is good--redemptive--in and for the present world. Our redemption is our justice. . . .¹⁰⁰

Traditional understandings of eschatology which emphasize life after death are challenged by Heyward's radical focus on the present. Both God and humanity are redeemed when justice is served, when people open to the "power of relation" and when right relation is made in the present.

Ruether challenges traditional Christian teachings about death. The Christian emphasis on life after death and the separation of the body and soul upon death, lead to an otherworldly theology and spirituality. The belief that the soul lives on in heaven while the body decomposes on earth, encourages the dualistic thinking which is at the heart of evil in Ruether's theology. Drawing from the work of Vine Deloria, Ruether critiques the concepts inherent in the belief in historical eschatology and personal immortality.¹⁰¹

Modern political revolutionary theory and Biblical religions share a linear view of history. Each has different ideals as to how life might be lived most fully. The political and philosophical theories suggest that there is a flow of historical events which lead

¹⁰⁰ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 132.

¹⁰¹ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 252; Vine Deloria, God is Red (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973), 169-187. Ruether uses Deloria's description of Native American understandings of time, the holy, and death, contrasting them with Christian understandings.

to the rectification of wrong and the emergence of a new order. Hope lies in changing the historical reality. Liberals understand these changes to be in the context of evolutionary development through the expansion of science and education and the advances made in social reform, while Marxists believe that a revolution will be necessary before social and economic ills can be fully addressed. Ruether suggests that belief in the unending development of technological wealth renders both liberal and Marxist views antithetical to an ecological worldview.¹⁰² In not acknowledging human relationship with the nonhuman world and disregarding the finite limitations of the earth, ecological realities are denied.

While political and philosophical revolutionaries have focused their efforts for change in the world, believing that the end point is a historical reality, Christians have focused on the realm of God beyond death. Though efforts to change the historical realities of suffering and injustice have been important to Christians they have been taught that completion can never be accomplished in this life. Only after death will injustices be addressed and peace restored. While the Christian emphasis on salvation at the final, end point beyond history has helped to keep history open, this emphasis has also removed human energies from the present and focused them on an unrealized transcendent possibility.

Ruether offers a model rooted in conversion to God/ess, to center, to harmony, to justice. Within Ruether's model there is no lost utopian condition, nor is there a historical end point where all

¹⁰² Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 253.

will be set right. Instead, the present order is the focus for the redemptive community. The necessary ingredients for the good life can be known in the present and are identifiable in the natural order. The good life grows through the "acceptance of finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships between people and between human and nonhuman beings."¹⁰³ It will not exist at an end point of history, but grows in the midst of life in the present when people live and work together in just, celebratory, supportive, sustainable, and creative communities. The work of creating such communities is ongoing, generation to generation. There is no set image of such communities, for they grow into their own expressions, responsive to the particularities of their own settings, carrying with them the lives of the past, into each new generation. Such communities are not planned by anyone, but grow among people in authentic relationship. That which is left undone is passed on to the next generation for completion, as that which blossoms is left to those who live to enjoy.¹⁰⁴ Such an understanding requires a long view. It encourages a vision which sees the present while holding in focus five, seven, perhaps ten generations of unborn grandchildren.

Ruether suggests that human responsibility is linked to the creation of redemptive community during the time that one lives. Such a focus calls up questions about human immortality and the injustices and suffering which are not rectified while people are alive. Ruether writes that the appropriate response to questions

¹⁰³ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 254.

¹⁰⁴ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 254-256.

about life after death must be one of agnosticism, for the answers simply cannot be known with any certainty. A more appropriate response to such questions is to focus on what is known.

What we know is that death is the cessation of the life process that holds our organism together. Consciousness ceases and the organism itself gradually disintegrates. This consciousness is the interiority of that life process that holds the organism together. There is no reason to think of the two as separable, in the sense that one can exist without the other.¹⁰⁵

Ruether's insistence on the integrity of the life process and its disruption at death, suggests that the ego is not everlasting. Instead, at death a person melts into the cosmic matrix of God/ess. The matrix of matter/energy is everlasting and the source of all new life. In death, the particular energy constellation of a person yields to the regenerative cycles of life that will give birth to new constellations of energy, new individuated organisms. Through death human organisms live on in new life forms, as do all other organisms. All participate in the natural cycle of birth-fruiting-death-decay-rebirth.

Traditional teachings emphasizing individual immortality and salvation are deeply challenged by Ruether's understanding. Death is no longer treated as evil, God is no longer set apart from the world, and humans no longer maintain individual identity beyond death. Instead, human efforts are focused on the present in the creation of renewed community. Not knowing the eternal meaning of human efforts does not render all efforts meaningless; the lack of

¹⁰⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 257.

certainty provides an invitation for faith that meaning is held in God/ess. Faith liberates people to the holy work of everyday life.

Summary

The feminist theologies of Ruether and Heyward emphasize the present as the realm of the holy. While each uses different language, different symbols, and different concepts to describe human relationship with the holy, both point to the centrality of right relationship, justice, and integrated human experience to redeemed humanity. Pointing to the ways that traditional theologies and the church's teachings have contributed to the fragmentation of the self and the separation of people from each other, nonhuman nature and the holy, Ruether and Heyward call for a new order where dualistic categories no longer exist. Both claim that justice is the ethical dimension of life lived in right relationship. Without justice there cannot be right relationship with each other or with the earth.

CHAPTER 3

Gestalt Therapy

Historical Background

Both written and oral traditions offer a rich source from which to learn the theory and practice of Gestalt. While the oral tradition has been important to the development and transmission of Gestalt during the past five decades, the changing quality of oral communication has made it quite difficult to trace the growth of Gestalt.¹ Further, practitioners of Gestalt bring their own personalities, theoretical emphases, and different clinical styles to the counseling relationship. Because the practice of Gestalt has dynamically influenced its theoretical development, individual personalities and biases often flavor the theoretical discussion. The following presentation of the main concepts of Gestalt includes the work of many theorists. While there has been an effort to be consistent and coherent in the choice of theoretical emphases, it must be remembered that there is a great diversity of views among those writing about and practicing Gestalt.

Fritz Perls is given credit for the development of Gestalt.² With the publication of Ego, Hunger and Aggression in 1947, Fritz Perls

¹ Lynne Margartet Jacobs, "I-Thou Relation in Gestalt Therapy" (Ph.D. diss., California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles, 1978), p. 9.

² Edward W. L. Smith, "The Roots of Gestalt Therapy," The Growing Edge of Gestalt Therapy, ed. Edward W. L. Smith (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1976), 3-36.

began what was to become a lively and significant theoretical discussion and practice of therapy which extends to the present.³ Though Fritz Perls is credited with the primary theoretical explication of Gestalt, and is perhaps most widely known, it is important to note that there have been numerous major contributors to its development, Laura Perls, Fritz Perls' wife, being one of the most significant. Until her death she remained a central figure in the Gestalt community. Daniel Rosenblatt has noted that Laura Perls was the "preeminent teacher and trainer" of Gestalt after Fritz Perls' death, and questions whether this might not have also been true while Fritz Perls was alive.⁴

The roots of Gestalt are psychoanalysis, existential phenomenology, Gestalt psychology, and Buddhism.⁵ Laura Perls has written that there are three overarching principles which give Gestalt coherence: field theory, phenomenology, and existentialism.⁶ While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the roots of Gestalt in detail, the three principles that Laura Perls has emphasized, field theory, phenomenology, and existentialism, will be considered.

³ Frederick S. Perls, Ego, Hunger and Aggression (London: Allen & Unwin, 1947).

⁴ Daniel Rosenblatt, "What Has Love Got to Do With It?," Gestalt Journal 11, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 63.

⁵ Edward W. L. Smith, "The Roots of Gestalt Therapy."

⁶ Laura Perls, et al. , "The Future of Gestalt Therapy: A Symposium," Gestalt Journal 4, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 9.

Holistic Theory and Phenomenology

Believing that people have lost a sense of integrated wholeness Perls attempted to address the dualistic fragmentation of experience by proposing a theory based on the unity and balance of nature.⁷ The definition of Gestalt offers an holistic understanding of this integrated reality.

A structure or configuration of physical, biological, or psychological phenomena so integrated as to constitute a functional unit with properties not derivable from its parts in summation.⁸

Fritz Perls' choice of Gestalt for the name of the therapy he proposed is important, as it points to a world view that attempts to address the dualistic bias of Enlightenment thought. Joel Latner writes that holism is the core principle of Gestalt.

The essence of the holistic conception of reality is that all nature is a unified and coherent whole. The organic and inorganic elements of the universe exist together in continuously changing process of coordinating activity. Each of these elements, in any scale--a plant, a continent, a child, a sunflower, an alga--is itself a coordinated integral process embedded in the larger whole. . . . At the same time that they appear to be discrete, objects and events

⁷ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, viii. Fritz Perls believed that human neurotic fragmentation is the result of cultural expectations which distance persons from their natural rhythms and needs. Joel Latner has pointed out that in making this suggestion Fritz Perls set up a duality between persons and culture, thus contradicting his thesis of holism. While there is ambiguity in the theoretical presentation of Gestalt therapy with regard to this issue, its deepest roots are in Gestalt field theory. Joel Latner, "This is the Speed of Light: Field and Systems Theories in Gestalt Therapy," Gestalt Journal 6, no. 3 (Fall 1983): 87.

⁸ "Gestalt," Webster's Third Third New International Dictionary.

participate in the unity formed of their relationships to other objects and events.⁹

Holism is rooted in the primary realities of relationship and process. Within a holistic worldview there is no subject or object, as there is no objective knowledge.

Latner suggests that two implications are derived from holistic theory. First, knowledge can only be gained through contact, be it with another person, a piece of art, a hibiscus, or a slab of granite. Events are not exclusively internal or external, but active and relational, and dependent on contact. Second, in holistic theory the emphasis is on the how rather than the why of experience. In other words, knowledge is gained in description of actual encounter, not in abstraction. The emphasis on encounter, on phenomena, is an emphasis on the present.¹⁰ Gestalt focuses on the present phenomenal world, what is happening now. Laura Perls suggests that such an approach in therapy requires the therapist to attend to the present of a situation, minimizing interpretation and maximizing experience.¹¹ The emphasis on the phenomenal present does not exclude past or future, for past and future have reality in the present. Within the present, people carry memories of the past and hopes for the future. For example, a woman may experience a great deal of pain because of childhood abuse. Focusing on the present does not dismiss the pain as an illusion of the past, but helps her

⁹ Joel Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book (New York: Julian, 1973), 5.

¹⁰ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 10.

¹¹ Laura Perls, "The Future of Gestalt Therapy," 9.

into the living experience of her pain as a present phenomena. Though the origins of the pain are in the past, the pain is most effectively addressed as a present experience. Interpretation primarily leads away from the present, while focusing on experience emphasizes the present. The same would apply for the future. Ideas and feelings about the future only have reality in the present.

Gestalt Field Theory

Gestalt is rooted in Gestalt field theory.¹² Gestalt field theory is a holistic theory of the nature of reality. Gary Yontef notes that there are commonalties among all field theories.¹³ One of the central themes they share is that all that exists--events, space, the organic and the inorganic--are of the field, while meaning and definition are gained through the relationships in the field. In other words, at birth a person does not have an inner core or essence that is separate from the environment. Instead, the person and environment comprise a whole; only in relation is there differentiation from the whole.

In a field theory analysis the concept of field replaces discrete material points . . . and dichotomous categories . . . as the unit of study. Everything is considered an integral part of a matrix of multiple interrelated forces and not caused by single, linear causes. In this view relations are inherent . . . and one starts with the whole rather than the parts.¹⁴

¹² Gary Yontef, "Modes of Thinking in Gestalt Therapy," Gestalt Journal 7, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 48.

¹³ Yontef, "Modes of Thinking in Gestalt Therapy," 48.

¹⁴ Yontef, "Modes of Thinking in Gestalt Therapy," 49.

Some of the difficulty in understanding the integrated worldview of field theory is due to the limitation of language. For example, the notion of parts is problematic as there are no autonomous parts which exist independent of the field. The differentiated aspects of the field, of the whole, exist through their multiple relations. People, the microbe community of soil, roses, and coyotes are not parts of the field, but are of the field, while the field is the integrated whole of all that exists. Differentiated aspects of the field and the whole exist co-extensively. Only in abstraction can they be set apart from each other.

In Gestalt field theory the relationship of the differentiated aspect and the environmental field is referred to as the organism/environment field. The organism/environment field is the ongoing, processive, ever-changing relationship of the organism and the environment. At the same time, individual identity through time exists as an aspect of the organism/environment field. Yontef notes that in many theoretical discussions one or the other is emphasized, the process or the structure. To do this is at best reductionistic, and at worst, dualistic. Instead, "both the process and the structural aspect are considered natural."¹⁵ Field theory offers an integrated worldview that understands the simultaneous reality of both wholeness and differentiation, process and structure, in the relational context of the organism/environment field.

¹⁵ Yontef, "Modes of Thinking in Gestalt Therapy," 60.

Existentialism

Existential philosophy influenced Gestalt in several ways. Certainly the phenomenological emphasis on present experience is rooted in existential philosophy as well as holistic theory. Responsibility is another central concern of existentialism that is shared by Gestalt. Irving Yalom, relying on the work of Martin Heidegger, writes about the existential understanding of the nature of people.

Heidegger referred to the individual as dasein (not as "I" or "one" or "ego" or a "human being") for a specific reason: he wished always to emphasize the dual nature of human existence. The individual is "there" (da), but also he or she constitutes what is there.¹⁶

While the reference to dual nature is unfortunate, calling up dichotomous categories of being, the existential emphasis on people existing in the world, and also, having some responsibility for what constitutes the world is important to Gestalt. This understanding of human nature is important in the following ways. First, it suggests the possibility of change in life situations, and second, it suggests that people have responsibility for their own lives and for their actions and inaction in the world. In making choices, people take responsibility for what happens or does not happen in the world.

Richard Hycner notes that while Gestalt was originally rooted in a relational understanding of the organism/environment field, it

¹⁶ Irving Yalom, Existential Psychotherapy (New York: Basic, 1980), 220; Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

has become highly individualistic in both theory and practice.¹⁷ Assuming full responsibility for creating and living one's life became a central theme, paving the way for a radical emphasis on self-support. Personal responsibility came to suggest an attitude of invulnerability from other people and self-support came to mean isolated self-reliance. The deep relational context of personal responsibility was lost. While responsibility continues to be a central theme in Gestalt there is currently a movement toward an interpretation of responsibility that is more in keeping with the original emphasis on the organism/environment field matrix.¹⁸ Responsibility grows out of knowing oneself as a self-supporting person in the context of mutual relations.

Laura Perls described the relational emphasis in Gestalt as an emphasis on dialogue.¹⁹ In a conversation with Maurice Friedman, Laura Perls spoke about the powerful effect Martin Buber had had on her.²⁰ Buber's personal presence and his philosophy of dialogue came to influence her own work to a great extent. She believed the dialogical to be the center of Gestalt.²¹

¹⁷ Richard Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy: An Initial Proposal," Gestalt Journal 8, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 24.

¹⁸ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy"; Jacobs, "I-Thou Relationship in Gestalt Therapy"; Laura Perls, "The Future of Gestalt Therapy"; Daniel Rosenblatt, "What Has Love Got To Do With It?"; Yontef, "Modes of Thinking in Gestalt Therapy."

¹⁹ Laura Perls, "The Future of Gestalt Therapy," 11.

²⁰ Maurice Friedman, The Healing Dialogue in Psychotherapy (New York: Aronson, 1985), 89.

²¹ Laura Perls, "The Future of Gestalt Therapy," 11.

Dialogue includes honoring, living in, experiencing the phenomenology of the person we're working with, and at the same time, disclosing who we are, showing our Presence. . . . I-Thou means commitment to dialogue, to Between.²²

Laura Perls' emphasis on dialogue is consistent with Hycner's emphasis.²³ Hycner writes that Gestalt has not had a consistent philosophical base, and that Gestalt would be well served if theorists and clinicians would ground their writings and work in the existential dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber. Relying on Buber's original work and the explications of Maurice Friedman, Hycner defines the dialogical in the following way.

By the dialogical is meant the overall relational context in which the uniqueness of each person is valued and where direct, mutual, and open relations between persons is emphasized. Such an approach encompasses the two major stances within the dialogical, which Buber earlier called the "I-Thou" and the "I-It" relationships, as well as the rhythmic alternation between them.²⁴

Hycner goes on to explain that the emphasis on dialogue acknowledges differentiation and relationship.

At the heart of this approach is the ontological belief that the "ultimate" basis of our existence is relational or dialogical in nature. This by no means is meant to obscure the uniqueness of the human being. . . . Quite to the contrary, such an approach celebrates the uniqueness of the individual within the context of the relational.²⁵

²² Laura Perls, "The Future of Gestalt Therapy," 11.

²³ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy," 26.

²⁴ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy," 26.

²⁵ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy," 29.

In emphasizing the primacy of the existential relationship of dialogue, Gestalt has begun a return to its deepest roots in the matrix of the organism/environment field.

Nature of People

Latner writes that "Gestalt starts with nature."²⁶ By this he means that the theory of Gestalt is taken from observing the natural flow, patterns, and rhythms of nature. The processes of the nonhuman world and of people are not separate, but different aspects of the same reality. Gestalt centers its theory of the nature of people on the biological structures and activities of natural functioning.

Organismic Self-Regulation

Organisms, be they rabbits, hollyhocks, or human beings, have needs which are essential to survival. Needs will differ according to species and to the particular functioning of individual organisms. In this framework humans are understood to have a complex range of needs including physical, emotional, aesthetic, and cognitive dimensions. If the organism is to thrive it must have these needs met. For example, without water a person will dehydrate and die. Without food a person will not be able to take in the complex assortment of vitamins, minerals, and nutrients that are needed for healthful functioning. Without beauty, cognitive stimulation, and nourishing contact, a person's experience is impoverished.

The process of self-regulation is rooted in the belief that a person has the ability to maintain harmonious balance. When a need

²⁶ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 12.

is present, a person will do what is necessary to fulfill that need. Self-regulation is dependent on sensory awareness and the use of aggression.²⁷ In Gestalt aggression is distinguished from violence. Aggression is understood to be a life energy which has neither positive or negative attributes. Both creation and destruction are necessary for life and rise out of the basic power of aggression. Violence is understood to be the result of the distortion and repression of the natural flow of aggression.²⁸

A central tenant of Gestalt is that, if uninterrupted and unimpaired, people are motivated to act for survival and healthy functioning. A dynamic process of self-regulation will include movement from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium to equilibrium. In the movement is growth and full functioning. Latner notes that the unimpaired process of self-regulation is one of organismic wisdom and economy.²⁹ The organism, when unimpaired, does not act beyond the limits of health and survival.

Gestalt Formation

Organismic self-regulation is an ongoing process throughout life. The cycle of need discernment, identification of what will satisfy the need, and movement in the environment toward need

²⁷ Gary Yontef, "Gestalt Therapy: Clinical Phenomenology," Gestalt Journal 2, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 28.

²⁸ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 32.

²⁹ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 14.

satisfaction, is continuous and necessary for life. Latner notes that the "process is the living of the organism."³⁰

Central to this activity, to living, is gestalt formation. Gestalt formation is the discernment of gestalts from the undifferentiated background of the organism/environment field. The formed gestalt becomes foreground set in the undifferentiated background. This relationship is also referred to as figure/ground. A gestalt is that which has one's attention and that which is meaningful in the present moment. For example, when driving down a street a woman is focused on the stop sign seventy-five feet ahead when a child runs in front of her car thirty feet ahead. The stop sign is foreground, the gestalt of her immediate attention when the child crosses in front of her. At the moment the child darts into the street the child becomes foreground, the gestalt of the woman's immediate attention, while the stop sign becomes background. The processive, ever changing quality of gestalt formation cannot be overemphasized. People are in a continual process of forming and destroying gestalts. Life is gestalt formation and destruction. Erving and Miriam Polster write about the importance of figure/ground reversibility.

Figure/ground reversibility is at the root of fluidity in life. Ideally, there would be no experience from the ground of existence which did not become figural.³¹

³⁰ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 22.

³¹ Erving Polster and Miriam Polster, Gestalt Therapy Integrated: Contours of Theory and Practice (1973; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1974), 33.

Healthy self-regulatory functioning is dependent on figure/ground reversibility. Gestalt formation, as it relates to the process of self-regulation, functions in the following way. A woman begins to feel anxious and a little agitated. At other times she has gone to the pantry to find something to eat during these times, eating having relieved her anxiety. But today she sits with her anxiety a little longer and realizes that it is not food that she needs. She realizes that she does not feel good about herself because of her current work situation. Instead of eating she begins to design a plan that will help her change her current work so that it is more satisfying. Having identified her real need and moved to act on it, her anxiety subsides and she is able to return to her work uninterrupted by feelings of agitation.

The above description is predicated on the cycle of gestalt formation not being interrupted or impaired. If the natural cycle is interrupted, a gestalt will be unclosed and the needs only partially satisfied. The unclosed gestalt will recede to the background but remain as an unsatisfied need. Thus, the flow of energy is interrupted and the person will not have the focus and intention that is necessary for further clear gestalt formation. Instead of full closure and the formation of new gestalten, a person continues to experience the "unfinished situation."³² For example, if the above mentioned woman had not been willing to sit with her agitation, the real need to change her work would not have become clear. Her gestalt would not have been sharp. She would have fallen into her

³² Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 295.

habitual pattern of eating to relieve anxiety. The need would remain, having receded to the background, though the symptom of anxiety would have temporarily been eased. Until a need is fully addressed it will remain as an unclosed gestalt which dissipates the natural flow of life energy.

In natural functioning people make decisions about what in the field they will attend to according to their needs. The process of "spontaneous dominance" refers to the initial selection of gestalten in response to one's greatest needs. Latner writes "The ethics and motivation of the organism arise out of spontaneous dominance."³³ Decisions about where to focus one's energy will be dependent on one's needs. The decision is a wholly organismic one, involving every aspect of the person.

Contact

Clear gestalt formation is dependent on adequate and appropriate contact. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman write that all experience is contact and that every human activity is an activity of the organism/environment field. This is inclusive of the social, cultural, biological, and physical dimensions of existence.³⁴

Experience occurs at the boundary between the organism and its environment, primarily the skin surface and the other organs of sensory and motor response. Experience is the function of this boundary. . . . The wholes of experience do not include "everything," but they are definite unified structures; and psychologically everything else, including the very notions of an organism or an environment, is an

³³ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 26.

³⁴ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 229.

abstraction. . . . We speak of the organism contacting the environment, but it is the contact that is the simplest and first reality.³⁵

Contact is necessary for gestalt formation and need satisfaction. Through contact a person distinguishes between what is to be taken in and what is to be left, whether to move closer or to withdraw. Neither gestalt formation or need satisfaction can be separated from contact which is the primary reality of existence.

Polster and Polster write that contact involves being touched through the sensory modalities of vision, smell, hearing, taste, touch, voice, and movement. Contact involves the experience of the whole person. For example, a man walking on a gravel path notices a flower growing along the edge. While he is able to identify the flower and has some contact with the flower, it is not until he bends low, looking at the flower closely, with his full attention, with his full body, that he is able to see the outline of its petals against the grey gravel, the delicate stamen, the veins of its leaves and sense the life flowing within it. Only then is he deeply touched by the reality of the flower.

Latner writes that the support functions of the complex organism/environment field are necessary for contact.³⁶ A single human activity, such as stroking a child's face, is dependent on a vast web of supports that includes a person's genetic, religious, and cultural heritage. These supports include the person's skeletal structure, the nerves in the hand, the air that is breathed into the

³⁵ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 227.

³⁶ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 56.

lungs and blood, the food that is taken into the body for energy replenishment, sunlight, rain, and the complex processes of the soil which give the food nutrients. A single activity depends on the whole of life. After noting that the qualities of the web of supports are influenced by heredity, individual constitution and past experiences, Latner addresses basic human needs.

Support also comes from the rest of the field, from the air we breathe and the food we eat and from the social conditions of which we are a part. We flourish when we have what we need. The basic elements we require are love and acceptance, and the physical, emotional, and intellectual stimulation that allows us to exercise all our abilities. These are the support required for healthy contact, and thus for successful gestalt formation.³⁷

Appropriate contact and clear and rich gestalt formation are dependent on healthy environmental support.

Contact-Boundaries

The contact-boundary is the processive, relational activity of the organism/environment field. Perls, Hefferline and Goodman define and discuss the definitional, relational, and processive nature of the contact-boundary.

The contact-boundary, where experience occurs, does not separate the organism and its environment; rather it limits the organism, contains and protects it, and at the same time it touches the environment...the contact-boundary--for example, the sensitive skin--is not so much a part of the "organism" as it is essentially the organ of a particular relation of the organism and the environment.³⁸

³⁷ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 58.

³⁸ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 229.

Polster and Polster suggest that the contact-boundary is where or, more processively stated, how a person distinguishes both self and not-self. In the differentiation of contact, both self and not-self are more fully defined and experienced.³⁹ All experience occurs at the contact-boundary, experiences of differentiation and relationship occur simultaneously.

Boundary Disturbances

Boundary disturbances are a disruption of the natural flow between self and other. Yontef writes disruptions can represent health or dysfunction.

For me, the "disturbance" in boundary disturbance does not refer to psychopathology, but to a disturbance or disruption in clear awareness and organismic flow between self and other. This disturbing of the clear recognition of self and other and/or disruption of contact or withdrawal based on the exchange of communications subsequent to that recognition can be healthy or pathological.⁴⁰

Good contact functions include a natural movement between withdrawal and contact. Edward Smith writes that psychobiological existence is predicated on a cycle of contact-satisfaction-withdrawal.⁴¹ When a need arises a person becomes aroused and excited. The excitement is experienced as emotion and moves into the muscoskeletal system where action takes place.

³⁹ Polster, and Polster, Gestalt Therapy Integrated, 102.

⁴⁰ Gary Yontef, "Comments on 'Boundary Processes and Boundary States,'" Gestalt Journal 11, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 26.

⁴¹ Edward W. L. Smith, "Self-Interruptions in the Rhythm of Contact and Withdrawal," Gestalt Journal 11, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 38.

Smith notes that any meaningful action will be interactive and if the flow is smooth, and the need is satisfied, the natural movement is toward withdrawal. The natural contact-satisfaction-withdrawal cycle can be interrupted at numerous points.

The I-boundary is the continuum of permissible contact that an individual experiences.⁴² New encounters expand the range of the I-boundary. If a contact violates the I-boundary a person will experience fear and threat to personal integrity.⁴³ In an effort to escape from or minimize the threat to integrity a person will make adjustments, disturbing the contact-boundary. A disturbance is dysfunctional to the extent that it is not appropriate to the need of the situation and is made without awareness. If a boundary disturbance is appropriate to the context and one is fully cognizant of one's actions, it is healthy. For example, after agreeing to spend the week away with a friend, a man realizes that his friend's inability to open to intimacy of any kind has made the time toxic for him. After trying to change the situation in numerous ways he makes the decision to withdraw from the trip and put his energies in other relationships and projects which are more satisfying. In this case the man is acting out of his own needs in a particular situation. His disturbing the contact is healthy because it is aware and appropriate. In another situation, a man who has been phobic about intimacy since a very early age, frantically withdraws from his companion fearing engulfment. In this case the withdrawal is not

⁴² Polster, and Polster, Gestalt Therapy Integrated. 108.

⁴³ Jacobs, p. 31.

healthy, but is movement toward a place of isolation without awareness. Dysfunction occurs when normal cycles of contact and withdrawal become patterns leading to habituated reactions that do not support good contact.⁴⁴

Yontef distinguishes between General Boundary Configurations of contact, withdrawal, intimacy, isolation, and confluence and Specific Boundary Disturbances of deflection, introjection, projection, and retroflexion.⁴⁵ Sylvia Fleming Crocker suggests the addition of a sixth disturbance, proflection.⁴⁶ General Boundary Configurations are more general than Specific Boundary Disturbances, including normal contact- boundary configurations. Specific Boundary Disturbances describe more particular dysfunctional processes. For example, a person may display specific

⁴⁴ Sylvia Fleming Crocker, "Proflection," Gestalt Journal 4, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 14.

⁴⁵ Yontef, "Comments on 'Boundary Processes and Boundary States,'" 27. Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman had earlier written that confluence was a boundary disturbance, including it with projection, introjection and retroflexion. Other boundary disturbances which have been suggested include egotism and desensitization. There has been considerable discussion through the years as to which should be included. For the purposes of this paper I have chosen to examine the most commonly accepted processes. Yontef's model offers a clear understanding in pointing to the relationship between general configurations and specific disturbances. See Smith, "Self-Interruptions," for a more thorough discussion of the ways boundary disturbances have been treated in the past.

⁴⁶ Crocker, "Proflection," 13. Proflection refers to doing toward others what one would like done to oneself. It is essentially manipulative. There is disagreement among theorists as to whether it should be considered among the others and has not been widely accepted as a boundary disturbance. See: Joel Latner and Miriam Polster, "Correspondence," Gestalt Journal 5, no. 3 (Fall 1982), 68-82; Sylvia Fleming Crocker, "A Respose to Joel Latner," Gestalt Journal 5, no. 3 (Fall 1982), 83-100; Joel Latner, "Water Under the Bridge: In Response To Sylvia Crocker," Gestalt Journal 5, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 101-108.

Boundary Disturbances without being isolated or confluent, while isolation and confluence will always reflect the existence of a Specific Boundary Disturbance.⁴⁷

The General Boundary Configurations of confluence and isolation describe the loss of boundary. Both represent the loss of the contact-boundary. When a person is confluent there is no awareness of difference. All flows together as a single whole, thus, one loses contact, boundary integrity, and any sense of individuality. When isolated a person loses awareness of others. Relationship, contact, and boundary integrity are lost in the experience of radical separation.⁴⁸

Specific Boundary Disturbances describe a more particular process. The boundary is disturbed, but contact and a sense of self and other remains. Introjection is taking into oneself aspects of the environment without integration and assimilation. It is an identification with aspects that are not the self. Through introjection, one loses contact with one's own experience and energy, and identifies instead with what comes to be a false self.⁴⁹ Projection is the inability to accept aspects of the self. Instead, they are identified with others in the environment. Through projection one becomes alienated from aspects of one's self, identifying them as belonging to others.⁵⁰ Retroflexion is the

⁴⁷ Yontef, "Comments on 'Boundary Processes and Boundary States,'" 28.

⁴⁸ Yontef, "Comments on 'Boundary Processes and Boundary States,'" 27.

⁴⁹ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 189.

⁵⁰ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 211.

process of doing to oneself what one originally did to others in an effort to have needs met. Rather than continue to act outward, trying to change the environment so that needs are met, through retroflection, the energies are turned toward the self as the focus of activity.⁵¹ Deflection refers to ways of avoiding direct contact. Rather than making direct contact, behavior which diverts attention and energy from the encounter is activated. Through excessive speech, inappropriate laughter, trivialization of what is being said, excessive abstraction, and poor eye contact, a person will deflect the intensity of the encounter.⁵²

Awareness

Jacobs writes, "Awareness is the experience of the contact process."⁵³ Awareness restores disrupted contact and works toward growth. Both contact and awareness function together, though awareness is dependent on contact. Yontef defines awareness as follows.

It is the process of being in vigilant contact with the most important event in the individual/environment field with full sensorimotor, emotional, cognitive, and energetic support.⁵⁴

Yontef expands on the above definition offering three corollaries.

⁵¹ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 146.

⁵² Polster and Polster, Gestalt Therapy Integrated, 89.

⁵³ Jacobs, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Yontef, "Gestalt Therapy: Clinical Phenomenology," 29.

Corollary One: Awareness is effective only when grounded in and energized by the dominant present need of the organism.

Corollary Two: Awareness is not complete without directly knowing the reality of the situation and how one is in the situation.

Corollary Three: Awareness is always Here and Now and always changing, evolving and transcending itself.⁵⁵

Awareness is always a present phenomena, though the subjects of one's awareness may be in the past or at a geographical distance. Full awareness suggests the involvement of the whole person in dynamic contact. Awareness includes openness to change and flexibility that is responsive to the reality of the present moment. Jacobs notes that awareness is not always on the foreground, but is present at many different levels. The important aspect of awareness, as it relates to the restoration of contact, is that a person be able focus awareness when necessary.⁵⁶

Jacobs outlines two ways that awareness is used in Gestalt.

(1) a process of developing sequential, transcending "awarenesses," more accurately called "the awareness continuum," and (2) a momentary, immediate absorption with self and environment which integrates the individual-in-the-situation. The first usage really refers to a process of attending to one's own awareness, whereas the second refers to the integrative experience wherein there is no need for directing attention.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Yontef, "Gestalt Therapy: Clinical Phenomenology," 30.

⁵⁶ Jacobs, 38.

⁵⁷ Jacobs, 36.

Through continuous and clear awareness, a person comes to experiences of the whole. The polarized and fragmented aspects of experience are integrated.⁵⁸

Yontef notes that awareness forms at the point of contact.⁵⁹ Awareness cannot exist apart from contact. When meaningful and good contact has been distorted, it is restored through enhanced and expanded awareness. As was discussed in the earlier section on boundary disturbances, Specific Boundary Disturbances lead to the experience of fragmentation. Because of the presence of boundary disturbances, a person does not have a clear and integrated sense of whole functioning. Clear awareness is necessary for change, and it is through awareness that contact is restored. For example, a woman does not involve herself in the arts because she thinks that she has no creativity. This belief has kept her from many expansive experiences and activities that would have enriched her life. As she begins to experience the pain of her restrictions she realizes that she really does not believe that she is lacking in creativity, but has introjected the idea from a kindergarten teacher who told her that her art work was not good because she colored outside of the lines of a mimeographed flower. It was not until she became fully aware of her present experience of pain and limitation that she was able to open to the possibility of working in the arts. In her new experience with the creative process she is in contact with aspects of the

⁵⁸ Yontef, "Gestalt Therapy: Clinical Phenomenology," 37.

⁵⁹ Gary Yontef, "A Review of the Practice of Gestalt Therapy," Gestalt Therapy Primer, ed. Douglas F. Stephenson. (Chicago: Charles Thomas, 1975), 164.

organism/environment field that she has never experienced. Her awareness grows as does her capacity for meaningful contact. Awareness and contact function together. Each enriches and expands the other.⁶⁰ Without contact, awareness cannot exist; without clear awareness, good contact cannot exist.

Awareness includes the realization and acceptance of responsibility. When full awareness is present a person can respond to a situation from the fullness of experience. This kind of flexible, aware responsiveness is contrasted with a habituated reflexive reaction which is lacking in awareness. Responsibility and awareness are interdependent aspects of experience.⁶¹

In Gestalt there is no division between conscious and unconscious. While recognizing the difference between the two forms of experience there is not a theoretical splitting of the two.⁶² Instead, there is simply the present and awareness of the present. One may be unaware of that which is background and later aware of the background which has now become figural. For example, a woman may interact with her child in ways that are violent. While she cannot seem to respond in other ways, the behaviors are almost reflexive, she does not feel good about the encounters which leave them both feeling wounded. She begins to feel her own pain and wants to learn more satisfying ways of living with her child.

⁶⁰ Jacobs, 35.

⁶¹ Yontef, "Gestalt Therapy: Clinical Phenomenology," 30.

⁶² Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 64-66.

Further, she realizes that she was treated in similar ways. The process of becoming aware of her own present needs and the limitations of her past, she becomes aware of that which was background. Her awareness leads to the possibility of change and expanded possibilities of creative response.

Self

In Gestalt, rooted in gestalt field theory, the self can only be understood in the context of the organism/environment field. The self is the system and process of contact, contact at the boundary. The relational nature of the self is primary. The self has an enduring quality as people experience stability, endurance, and coherence through time. In field theory, structure and process cannot be separated. Yontef writes about their interrelationship.

That stable structures exist is not doubted, but they are conceptualized as processes. Process is rhythmic, continual, has internal consistency, i.e. it is structural.⁶³

Yontef's emphasis on the existence of both structure and process is very important. Eliminating either aspect renders a partial and inaccurate description of human existence. The emphasis on structure does not denote the existence of a core structure, substance, or essence, but instead, refers to the subjective experience of selfhood through time.

Yontef notes that there are multiple definitions of self, many contradictory.⁶⁴ Rather than reduce the definition of self to essence

⁶³ Gary Yontef, "The Self in Gestalt Therapy: Reply to Tobin," Gestalt Journal 6, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 59.

⁶⁴ Yontef, "Assimilating Diagnostic and Psychoanalytic Perspectives Into Gestalt Therapy," 11, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 17.

or process, he proposes that the term self be used as a reflexive pronoun and refer to the whole person. As a whole person, subject and object are the same.⁶⁵ This terminology suggests a holistic understanding of self. The self is a web of processes of a deeply relational matrix. Through this understanding of self, all activities are understood to be activities of the whole person. The emphasis is on the processes of experience of the whole person. For example, if a person projects onto others aspects of her/himself that are split from awareness, the person is involved in the process of splitting and projection. He/she is not a split person, which is the case if the emphasis is on the noun.

The self, the whole person, has different modes of functioning. The id and ego modes represent two central functions.⁶⁶ A person experiences the id mode as non-discriminating, open to the flow of experience and fluid. Boundaries may be less clear than in other situations.

The id is the mode of functioning where we feel ourselves as acted upon by and responsive to the environment, almost automatically. Id functioning is playful, devoid of volition; it occurs when the flow of sensory and motor impulses goes with hindrance or difficulty.⁶⁷

The id mode emphasizes the integrated flow of experience and open receptivity. In the id mode one experiences oneself as fully

⁶⁵ Yontef, "Assimilating Diagnostic and Psychoanalytic Perspectives," 18.

⁶⁶ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy, 369-383.

⁶⁷ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 51.

integrated in the environment with little separation between self and not self.

The ego mode denotes more willful, active, discriminating behavior. Through differentiation, abstraction and evaluation of the field, the ego mode makes decisions about what to assimilate and what to reject. Boundaries are very defined. Structure, separation, choice, and willfulness are emphasized.

Gestalt theorists emphasize the idea that a person's functional mode is determined by the context of one's situation and that most people's behavior, when not dysfunctional, is comprised of activities representing both modes.⁶⁸ For example, a woman who makes photographs needs to be able to function in ego mode as she makes decisions about equipment, setting, light availability, materials, and location. In the actual photographing, developing and printing, ego mode activities are important. The id mode activities are important as she opens herself to the moment of taking a photograph. The process of taking a photograph is dependent on a flow of light from the subject of her attention to the film in the camera. The actual photograph negative represents the moment of encounter. Her open waiting for the moment of encounter in the id mode is equally as important as the linear, discriminating functions of the ego mode.

Health and Dysfunction

Health in the framework of Gestalt consists of the formation of clear, rich gestalts in an ongoing free flowing process. In health,

⁶⁸ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 54.

the contact-boundary is not inappropriately blocked or disturbed. Health includes full awareness and good contact.

Healthy people can discern their needs, look to the field for possibilities of satisfaction and move toward those possibilities. As the organism/environment field is constantly changing healthy people are keenly aware of the changes and respond appropriately. As compromises are a part of living, healthy people are able to accept them and move on to the formation of new gestalten.

Health involves self-support through balanced self-regulation and good contact.⁶⁹ Relationship is primary to human experience and self-support is necessary for full functioning. Self-support is related to empowerment; people extending themselves as fully as possible, using their own powers and abilities to attain what is necessary for survival, and moving from a position of dependency to interdependent strength. Self-supportive behaviors will have authenticity, integrity, and honesty. This is contrasted with behaviors which are manipulative and lacking in honesty.

Health is dependent on the coordinated activity of the whole person. Polarized aspects of experience are integrated as people claim that which has been kept from awareness through the process of splitting. In health, all human functions work together.⁷⁰ When

⁶⁹ Frederick S. Perls, The Gestalt Approach and Eye Witness to Therapy (1973; reprint, New York: Bantam, 1978), 45. The concept of self-support was originally associated with healthful self-regulation. As Gestalt therapy became more individualistic in theory and practice, self-support came to be interpreted differently, losing the emphasis on organism/environment field balance. The emphasis on individualism is found in the cited reference.

⁷⁰ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 42.

integrated, the sensing, emotional and cognitive aspects of experience function as a whole. For example, the planting of corn is not only a physical activity, but includes emotional and cognitive aspects as well. Physically one prepares the soil, makes an opening with a stick so that the earth can receive the kernel, covers the corn, waters the fertile earth, and begins the seasonal activities that will be necessary for the corn to mature and come to fruition. Much thought will go into plans for the maintenance of the newly planted corn. While taking place in the present moment, corn planting has taken place in many past moments. The present planting of corn binds a person with many centuries of people. As one opens to this experience the planting of corn can be an emotional experience as well as a sensual and cognitive experience. Emotions may be experienced in other ways as well: fear about drought, joy with harvest, or pleasure in providing for one's family. Corn planting, as any other activity, can be an integrated experience.

Healthy experience is present experience. Latner notes that living fully in the present requires that one be open to new possibilities as they arise.⁷¹ The awareness of the demands of each moment allows people to explore the full range of possibilities for response. Responses are appropriate and possibilities are expanded with open awareness of the present. Such openness requires the suspension of judgement and giving oneself over to the experience at hand.⁷² In so doing, one relinquishes control, giving oneself to one's

⁷¹ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 58.

⁷² Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 59.

present life process which has its own urgency and requirements. One's actions gain authenticity as one responds from experience that is present, aware, non-controlling and open.

Responsibility is a central characteristic of full functioning and is dependent on awareness in the present. If one is fully aware, one can respond to a situation in an appropriate way. Such a response is rooted in the real life encounter of the present, not in ideals or abstractions of what should happen. Responsibility, in the sense that it is used in Gestalt, is an integrated activity involving the whole person in response to the organism/environment field requirements of the moment. For example, if one opens to the stories and pain experienced by the boat people of Vietnam, one will begin to take actions that will help to address the situation of their suffering. Such actions rise out of real encounter and are not based on abstract ideals of rights, equality, justice, and truth. They are free, creative responses rooted in the integration of thinking, feeling and sensing.

Personal health is enhanced by a healthy environment.⁷³ Because a person's existence is within the relational activity of the organism/environment field, the health of the field will influence the health of the individual to a great extent. This is not to say that full functioning people cannot exist in adverse environmental conditions, but that nourishing environmental conditions are more supportive of well-being. For example, a woman who lives alone with three small children in a very restricted economic situation

⁷³ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 62-64.

may in fact be fully functioning in Gestalt terms, being aware of her situation and functioning very well in her adverse circumstances. At the same time her environmental supports are minimal. A more supportive economic and social climate would enrich her life situation, opening more options for good contact and a fuller life for herself and her children.

Full functioning in Gestalt is the process of creative living. One never reaches a place of full integration and health. Instead, health is understood to be an ongoing process of life, where creative adjustments are made in response to the the changing needs of the organism/environment field. Maturity is living in this process. In being open to the events of life and responsive to the needs of the present one grows into full maturity, into the fullness of living, into centeredness.

To be centered is to deal with the circumstances of our lives as they present themselves according to the dictates of healthy functioning. . . . Centered, we freely engage in the process of change that is free functioning. We are responsible for our existence. We are ripe. We have achieved that state of being that our structure will come to if we and the environment permit. . . . the particular form of maturity is not spelled out. It cannot be. Vested in the unique occurrences of our lives, our maturity takes the form of our self functioning in our reality.⁷⁴

Health is integrated responsiveness to the realities of the present.

Much of what describes dysfunction can be understood as the disruption of the flow of clear, rich gestalts. The process of self-regulation is hindered through the disruption of contact and dulled

⁷⁴ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 67.

awareness. When people experience dysfunction they are not able to discern their own needs or the reality of their situation. Instead, behaviors which suggest the presence of Specific Boundary Disturbances dominate. Jacobs notes that people who experience dysfunction do not contact reality, but contact introjections and projections which distance them further from the present reality of their lives.⁷⁵ Responding to the internal world of projections and introjections, they no longer trust the adequacy of their self-regulatory systems, and increasingly live in a reality dominated by fear and illusion. In dysfunction, the free and coordinated movement of a person who is centered gives way to rigidity, control and manipulation.⁷⁶ Trust in self and the environment is destroyed. Self-supportive behaviors no longer exist and people who experience dysfunction look to ways of manipulating the environment to have needs met, thus, further compromising their integrity and sense of power. They try to control their own free functioning which is perceived as untrustworthy, and they try to control others in an effort to alleviate anxiety and have their needs met. Mature creative adjustment, which rises out of full contact and clear awareness, is replaced by habituated, ineffective reaction.

Most dysfunctional patterns of behavior begin in childhood.⁷⁷ When children are confronted with situations which threaten their

⁷⁵ Jacobs, p. 42.

⁷⁶ Jacobs, p. 42.

⁷⁷ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 85.

safety or integrity they do what is necessary to protect themselves while not jeopardizing their support. Children will ignore their own needs and bend to the demands of adults for the promise of security, whether or not it is given. Their contact processes become distorted and inappropriate adjustments are made. For example, if children meet violence when they express their needs they soon learn to ignore their own process of self-regulation. Soon, what is ignored will no longer be accessible, as they push away their immediate experiences. While the adjustments that they made may have been necessary for their young survival they learn to ignore their own organismic wisdom. The sacrifices of childhood are carried into adulthood where they may no longer serve any purpose. Latner notes several problems which arise from this cycle.⁷⁸ First, while the threat may no longer exist, people continue to respond as though it does. Second, in the disruption of free functioning contact, people lose some capacities for need identification and satisfaction. Third, the energy that is invested in the unfinished business of the original threat is not available to present living. The experience of dysfunction is the experience of limitation, constriction, and habituation.

Restoration of Growth

Gestalt is grounded in the belief that people can change and learn more harmonious ways of functioning in the world. Restoring health and integrated functioning includes restoring contact,

⁷⁸ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 86.

awareness, lively gestalt formation and self-regulation in a natural cycle of functioning.

The practice of Gestalt is based on the paradoxical theory of change. Change is defined in the following ways.

1. to make different. . . . 2. to substitute another or others in place of (something under consideration): make substitution of or among.⁷⁹

This traditional understanding of change suggests that transformation occurs when something is made different or when there is a substitution made for something that already exists.

The paradoxical theory of change is quite different than this traditional understanding. Arnold Beisser proposes that people do not change when they try to become something other than who they are, but when they fully become who they already are.⁸⁰ Change does not occur when something is made different or a substitution is made, but when what already exists is fully accepted. For change to occur, that which has been pushed away and forgotten must be reintegrated into experience. The lost must be claimed and befriended. By allowing the whole of experience into awareness people can identify with their whole selves, not the wounded selves of childhood or the partially functioning selves of adulthood.

⁷⁹ "Change," Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

⁸⁰Arnold R. Beisser, "The Paradoxical Theory of Change," Gestalt Therapy Now: Theory, Techniques, Applications, eds. Joen Fagan, and Irma Lee Shepherd (Palo Alto: Science & Behavior Books, 1970), 77.

Fritz Perls identified five layers of neurosis.⁸¹ First is the cliché layer, the exchanges between people are no deeper than the level of clichés. Second is the game layer, where people function at the level of role playing. The first two layers are characterized by manipulative activities. Third, is the impasse. In impasse people have relinquished much of their neurotic functioning and have not yet found new ways of living that are healthy. Fourth, is the implosive layer where people experience feelings of despair, pain, and the fear of death. Implosion implies the contraction and paralysis of energy. As people move further into the implosive layer, fully experiencing the deadness, they experience explosion. The fifth layer, explosion, refers to the experience of coming to life, of fully contacting one's experience. Through explosion energies are freed and expressed in powerful ways. Movement through the multiple layers of neurosis restores faith in the life process and the capacity for self-regulation.⁸² Movement from the first stages of manipulation and immersion in a life of projections and introjects, to the last stage of full experience, is painful and frightening. If people try to avoid the pain of the process they will not know freedom and healing. Fritz Perls wrote that "To suffer one's death and to be reborn is not easy."⁸³ To heal into natural functioning is to die and be reborn, again, and again, and again.

⁸¹ Frederick S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, ed. John O. Stevens (1969: reprint, Moab, Utah: Real People, 1969), 55.

⁸² Jacobs, p. 46.

⁸³ Frederick S. Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, inscription on preliminary page.

The work of therapy focuses on the processes of the self. In the therapeutic relationship people explore the ways they live their lives, what works and what does not work and how they are limited. Restoration of contact and awareness are central tasks with the primary goal being the development of healthier relationships in the world.⁸⁴ To a large extent this is accomplished through the dialogical relationship of client and therapist. Self-support is emphasized as people are encouraged to learn from therapy and take the learnings into the world outside of the therapeutic relationship. Latner writes about the focus in therapy.

The point of therapy is to deal with our inability to deal satisfactorily with the circumstances of our life, and to discover the resources of our self, so that we can develop the new solutions we require to meet the demands of our needs and the environment.⁸⁵

This understanding suggests a very practical, phenomenological, present focus for therapy. Issues of empowerment, identity, self-esteem, problem solving, and a focus on the needs of the self and the environment are identified. Health is known with the restoration of faith in organismic wisdom.

Summary

The basic principles of Gestalt are drawn from phenomenology, gestalt field theory, and existentialism. Central tenants in Gestalt

⁸⁴ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy: An Initial Proposal," 25. Hycner notes that the goal of enhanced awareness and contact is inadequate. Instead, the focus needs to be on the development of meaning and qualitatively better relationships with the world. He writes that "Expanding contact or awareness is not a goal in itself but is useful only insofar as it helps this person establish a better relational stance to the world, a healthier person/environment interaction."

⁸⁵ Latner, The Gestalt Therapy Book, 130.

include the understanding that a person is of the organism/environment field, that relations are primary to experience, and that good contact and awareness are essential to self-regulation. The dialogical attitude is emphasized in theory and practice. Health is understood to be the natural flow of clear, crisp gestalt formation which is dependent on good contact and awareness. Inappropriate disruption of contact leads to dysfunction and unfinished business which distorts the perception of the present. The therapeutic relationship is dialogical and provides the context where people gain awareness of dysfunctional processes. In therapy they can experiment with new behaviors and extend new learnings into non-therapeutic situations. Natural functioning is restored when appropriate contact and clear awareness exist to enhance a person's relationships with the world.

CHAPTER 4

A Regenerative, Earth-Centered Focus in Theory

Introduction

There are numerous themes in Gestalt and the theologies of Heyward and Ruether that are consistent with the concerns of transformative feminism and the development of a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling. In this chapter both the strengths and the weaknesses in these works will be discussed. The transformative feminist framework presented by Karen Warren, described in Chapter 1, will be used as a guide in evaluating the adequacy and thoroughness of the Gestalt model and these feminist theologies in outlining the main points of an holistic, regenerative framework. The theoretical implications of Gestalt and the theologies of Heyward and Ruether will be discussed as they impact pastoral counseling.

There are several important questions to this discussion. Is there a theoretical base in this material for the development of integrated and ecological consciousness? How are the human experiences of autonomy and relationship reconciled? Does the proposal of a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling enhance work already being done by changing focus and opening new areas of concern? How is the holy known in such a model? Does a regenerative, earth-centered focus address the concerns of the broad base of people? How is a deep caring,

embodied justice expressed? What is the identity of pastoral counselors and pastoral counseling centers in the light of such a model? How can pastoral counselors directly participate in the work of healing the earth? What are the implications for the pastoral goal of reconciliation with self, other persons, nonhuman nature, and the holy? These questions are important as the reader is asked to reflect on the ways pastoral counseling is currently practiced, the issues of this era, and how pastoral counseling might better address personal and environmental brokenness.

Transformative Feminist Theory, Gestalt,

Ruether, and Heyward

The Relationship of Human to Nonhuman

At the heart of the eco-feminist and transformative feminist effort is the dissolution of dualistic structures of consciousness. According to these theorists hierarchies of value, personal and social relations of domination, and oppressive social, political and economic structures, grow out of dualistic conceptual categories. There is also recognition of the ways oppressive social structures support the continued existence of dualistic conceptual categories. Each perpetuates the other. To the extent that the current ecological crises exist because of dualistic categories which separate nature and human, life and death, culture and nature, man and woman, body and spirit, an integrative understanding of existence is necessary if life is to survive. Many possibilities for harmonious and unified living are emerging because of growing

human awareness that the earth is a living organism.¹ This shift in perspective invites new understanding, deepened awareness of the complexity and interrelatedness of the earth's processes, and human response. Transformative feminism, sensitive to natural and cultural dimensions, offers an holistic, non-hierarchical way of understanding existence based on principles of ecological continuity, integrity, and harmony.

A holistic framework necessitates a reevaluation of what it means to be human. Transformative feminism weaves together torn threads of the fabric of existence, reuniting human and nonhuman, culture and nature. Understanding the self in terms of ecology, of the multiple processes which work together to support and maintain life, the self only exists in the context of the larger macrocosm which functions as an interrelated whole. The myriad processes of life contribute to the simultaneous maintenance of the whole and the individual. While humans are of the earth and intimately related to nonhuman nature, humans have unique capacities that distinguish them from nonhuman nature. Humans and nonhumans are co-members of the community of earth.

The centrality of Gestalt field theory in Gestalt provides a model which is consistent with the transformative feminist understanding of the appropriate relationship between human and nonhuman. The Gestalt emphasis on the natural processes of life being consistent throughout human and nonhuman nature reunites

¹ James E. Lovelock, Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).

that which has been separated by modern scientific theory and classical philosophy. The holistic emphasis of Gestalt field theory addresses the transformative feminist concern about appropriate human identity. In field theory every aspect of reality is understood to participate in the whole. Relational processes are inherent in the natural structures of reality, while differentiation rises out of natural relational processes. In Gestalt the concept of contact, from which grows individuated selfhood and relationship, establishes the primacy of contact, of encounter. Individuation and relationship are of the same fabric of contact. Contact is the first reality.

The organism/environment field provides a conceptual understanding of the processive, interactive nature of all that exists, human and nonhuman, human and human, nonhuman and nonhuman. Both process and structure are acknowledged as critical to a holistic understanding of reality. The Gestalt emphasis on the support functions of the organism/environment field suggests that interdependence, reciprocity, and mutuality are central to the life processes of the earth. A single aspect of reality, or a single human action can only exist with the support of infinite other processes of the earth, the whole of life. When the background of support is integrated, life and death exist in the context of a natural, regenerative cycle. When the background is fragmented, the cycle is disrupted and the process of living and dying loses coherency, meaning, and natural flow.

Through the development of awareness and good contact people may come to understand that they are individuals and co-members of the earth. The Gestalt understanding of awareness and good contact,

contact that is not inappropriately disrupted, point to the qualities of human experience which transformative feminists support. Meaningful and good contact is maintained through clear awareness. Through good contact, growing awareness of the background of support, and clear awareness of the foreground, there is greater possibility for experiences of unmediated living. Unmediated experience exists in the present and engages the whole person. Unmediated experience is holistic. Through experiences of unmediated living people may come to know themselves to be of the earth.

The Gestalt emphasis on the full development, experience, and integration of the affective, cognitive, and sensory modes works to dissolve the dualities separating mind from body, thought from feeling, being from doing. The task of integrating that which is split off from awareness is central to the development of clear identity with nonhuman nature. Appropriate human identity is an integrated identity where people know themselves in the context of the human and nonhuman interface. Gestalt offers a model of natural, whole, full-bodied, aware people in good contact. This understanding of human identity is congruent with the transformative feminist hope. Ecological consciousness, the awareness of the intimacy of human and nonhuman relationship, is dependent on the development of integrated selfhood and the honoring of thinking, feeling, and sensing.

Theological reflection on the relationship of human to nonhuman includes aspects of three categories: God, Nature, and Humanity. Both Ruether and Heyward work toward the dissolution of dualisms

in their theologies. They attempt to address the dualistic categories of spirit/matter, nature/culture, man/woman, immanence/transcendence, relationship/autonomy, replacing them with an integrative framework that transforms the polarities of dualisms into natural dialectics. To a large extent this is achieved.

Heyward claims that the primary reality of existence is relational, and that God is only known in the present relationships of everyday life. This is inclusive of the whole of creation. Heyward envisions God as the creative power of relation, that which heals, loves, and beckons toward growth. God is the power which binds in relationship, liberates, blesses, nourishes, and creates. Though Heyward emphasizes human relationship in her work, God is the power experienced in relationship with all that is the earth.² In using the metaphor of "banquet of life" to describe creation, and focusing on God revealed in passionate, embodied relationship, Heyward collapses the separation between human and nonhuman, making each a co-member of the earth. Heyward affirms the earthy fact of existence and human freedom, thus addressing the spirit/matter dualism. Through the mortal body of relationships, the flesh of all created life, God is known in the world. Though Heyward emphasizes God's presence in the world, transcendence is not sacrificed for immanence. God is the "power in relation" in the whole of life. God is the creative power calling people to live in passion and justice, with each other and with the earth. In the choice of whether or not to respond to God's call lies human freedom.

² Heyward, The Redemption of God, 6.

Knowing God in the here-and-now of life does not mean God is only immanent, for God's transcendence is expressed through the depth and extensiveness of God's presence in the world.

Heyward's belief that God is the creative "power in relation" from which people draw nourishment, realize who they are, and experience the bond which connects them, is resonant with the Gestalt understanding of good contact. According to Heyward, both the fullness of self and relationship are known through "power in relation," through God. In Gestalt, both self and other are known through the processes of contact and awareness. In the Gestalt framework the quality of contact moments are differentiated; some moments are full while others are not. For example, Jacobs writes that the I-Thou relationship is a moment of contact in the contact-withdrawal process and is "the most highly developed form of contactful awareness."³ At the same time, not all good contact is and of the quality to which Heyward refers. Good contact may not be full contact leading to an I-Thou encounter. When Heyward refers to God as the "power in relation," she refers to a particular kind of contact that empowers people to live in right relationship with each other. Heyward's call for passionate relationship counters the objectification, disruption of right relationship, and attitude of indifference which so thoroughly typifies the modern world. Yet, there is a greater range of right and good relationship than Heyward indicates, including degrees of passion, concern, and care. In the Gestalt framework the moments of withdrawal are as necessary as

³ Jacobs, p. 90.

the moments of full encounter. Without one the other cannot exist. In the spirit of dialogue moments of I-It relation are known in the context of the rhythmic movement between I-It and I-Thou. There are many moments of good contact and clear awareness, and there are many aspects of right relationship, some of them fully passionate and all of them holy. Heyward offers an holistic image through her emphasis on passion in relation and the presence of God in the world. While the tone of her work emphasizes a fullness of encounter associated with I-Thou moments of encounter, the spirit of dialogue is supported through the emphasis on respect, care, relationship, openness, and responsiveness.

Ruether's presentation of God/ess recognizes the relationship of spirit and matter. God/ess holds what is present as it is expressed in the reality of embodiment, and what may be future as it represents potentiality. In God/ess authentic selfhood is known and called forth through the actual lived experiences of encounter in the world. God/ess is that which heals, liberates, reconciles, and harmonizes the fragmented self, self with others, and human with nonhuman. God/ess is the heart of reconciliation. In God/ess the separation between spirit and matter dissolves.

The God/ess who is primal Matrix, the ground of being-new being, is neither stifling immanence nor rootless transcendence. Spirit and matter are not dichotomized but are the inside and outside of the same thing. When we proceed to the inward depths of consciousness or probe beneath the surface of visible things to the electromagnetic field that is the ground of atomic and molecular structure, the visible disappears. Matter itself dissolves into energy. Energy, organized in patterns and relationships, is the basis for what we experience as visible things. It becomes

impossible anymore to dichotomize material and spiritual energy.⁴

Through Ruether's presentation of God/ess and her formulation that matter and spirit are different manifestations of the same energy, the polarities of spirit/matter and human/nonhuman are addressed. Human consciousness is unique, not set against nonhuman nature.

Ruether's understanding of the "renewed community of creation" supports the transformative feminist vision of right relationship between human and nonhuman. Through "conversion to the earth" humans can use the whole of their capacities to restore ecological balance, integrity, and justice. "Ecological intelligence" requires the development of affective and cognitive dimensions in both men and women. While the converted humanity to which she refers is not yet in existence, the hope for integrated selfhood for women and men, and harmonious relationship with nonhuman nature depends on this transformation. Ruether's dream of the "renewed community of creation," "ecological intelligence," and the present-future dialectic of God/ess, supports the transformative feminist understanding that human identity is unique, while at the same time humans are co-members of the earth with nonhuman nature.

Ruether's emphasis on the importance of the development of "ecological intelligence" raises concern about the danger of utopianism. Her insight into what is necessary is clear and consistent with a belief in the possibility and necessity for humans to change at both personal and structural levels. As the earth

⁴ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 86.

continues to suffer the impact of centuries of exploitation and the relentless acts of violence in the present, one wonders if there will be time enough for the personal transformation of the majority of people and the structural changes in social, political, and economic spheres. If the researchers of the World Watch Institute are right about the short time left before the earth's regenerative powers will be so vastly damaged that the tide of ecological devastation cannot be changed, there is a tremendous amount that will have to be accomplished in the next decade.⁵ While Ruether's image of a "renewed community of creation" rectifies many of the issues pressing on the restorative capacity of the earth, the very real limits of present sustainability raise the question of time. The title of John Cobb's book Is It Too Late?, published in 1972, is even more pressing today as the earth is pushed closer to ecological collapse. In light of the short time necessary for the personal, relational, social, and international changes that are necessary, human hope must lie with the knowledge that the holy is present in the world inviting persons to open their hearts and minds to the reality of a perishing world, new experiences of harmonious living, and supporting their courageous efforts for changes that will preserve the earth. Ruether's dream of a "renewed community of creation" calls for faithfulness, courage, and hope that lives in the midst of evil; it does not offer certainty.

⁵ Brown, Flavin, and Postel, "Forward" State of the World 1989.

Interconnecting Oppressions

Transformative feminism attempts to reveal the interrelationships among all forms of oppression. The original focus of feminism, the liberation of women, is extended to the liberation of all life from systems of oppression. The oppressions of sex, race, class, nature, and sexual orientation are understood to rise out of a patriarchal, dualistic conceptual framework and social relations of domination which rise from hierarchies of value.

The writings in Gestalt do not reflect an awareness of the multiple and interrelated oppressions of sex, race, class, nature, and sexual orientation. While the early writings focused on the damage that oppressive relationships and restrictive cultural expectations have on the person, little emphasis was given to the particulars of the structures of oppression. Oppression is not a word that is used in the Gestalt literature. Instead the focus is on organismic functioning within the supportive and non-supportive environments.⁶

As was noted in Chapter 3, there is a growing body of literature emphasizing the centrality of relationship and the importance of the background in Gestalt theory.⁷ The relational implications of the organism/environmental field and the contact-boundary are replacing the earlier emphasis on the self-sufficient individual. The revival of contact to Gestalt theory has led to a discussion

⁶ Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, Gestalt Therapy.

⁷ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy"; Sonia Nevis, "Bringing the Background into the Foreground," Gestalt Journal 8, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 61-64; Gary Yontef, "Gestalt Therapy 1986: A Polemic," Gestalt Journal 10, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 41-68.

about preventative care and a challenge of modern values which have risen out of the modern scientific model.⁸ From this movement there are seeds for a growing awareness of the many faces of oppression and their common roots.

Sonia Nevis notes that the Gestalt emphasis has been on the development of clear, vivid, coherent figures without adequate attention to the quality of the background from which the figure arises.

Our focus is on the vibrant, lively, formation of a spontaneous figure . . . on the process. But the ground is content. Theory hints at the process of assimilation but does not offer a criteria for the what--the content. Yet it is the what that provides the parts of the formation of the fresh figure.⁹

The quality of figure formation is dependent on the background of experience. In keeping with Nevis' concern Yontef suggests that it is important for Gestalt theorists to give more attention to the background of experience, the context of living. In focusing on the background there is an emphasis on culture and community as well as organismic functioning.¹⁰

Theo Skolnik writes that Gestalt therapists should focus on primary prevention.¹¹ Rather than looking only at the ways that people do not function fully, Skolnik suggests that it is important to

⁸ Theo Skolnik, "What Do We Call Survival," Gestalt Journal 10, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 5-25.

⁹Nevis, "Bringing the Background into the Foreground," 64.

¹⁰Yontef, "Gestalt Therapy 1986," 58.

¹¹Skolnik, 10.

look at the environmental dimension of living as well. In looking at the background of experience Gestalt therapists address the quality of life support and that which limits full integration and personhood. Skolnik writes that a person who asks about the meaning of life is not neurotic, but she/he is appropriately distressed given the issues facing people in the modern age. He goes on to suggest that such awareness and distress is requisite for a skilled Gestalt therapist.

We are necessarily talking about global survival Consciousness provides an awesome strength in the world, and with it an awesome responsibility. And I am arguing that if you are not distressed, living in today's society, it has to be a sure sign of a characterological flaw. With that kind of characterological deficit, I argue, a person has no right to call her or himself a Gestalt therapist. And if the vast majority of Gestalt therapists are complacent then there is no purpose within society for Gestalt to exist.¹²

Skolnik's thesis is supportive of the idea that awareness of and response to the unique modern stresses of the organism/environment field is not only normal, but it is necessary for full human development.

The concepts of the organism/environment field, the primacy of contact, and figure-ground reversibility, offer a theoretical structure from which to develop an understanding of the interconnections among oppressions. In emphasizing contact as the primary reality from which individuation and relationship arise, Gestalt theorists address dualisms separating self and other, human and nonhuman, nature and culture. As oppressions of sex, race, class, nature, and sexual orientation are based on dualistic

¹² Skolnik, 24.

conceptual categories, Gestalt can be instrumental in the transformation of dualistic consciousness and the multiple forms of oppression in which people participate. The weakest point in Gestalt theory, with regard to this issue, is the lack of a thorough analysis of the social structures of oppression and the use of power. The adoption of a transformative feminist analysis of the structures of oppression will strengthen the Gestalt model considerably. Skolnik's concern about the adoption of preventive measures in treatment through examining social factors is a beginning effort. In the same spirit, Yontef's call to look at the background of figural development, raising culture and community into awareness, begins to include an important dimension. Awareness of the history of patriarchy and the ways that it has blocked the development of integrated selfhood and harmonious community, oppressed women, children, people of color, nature, and gay and lesbian persons, will strengthen the Gestalt understanding of the importance of background to figural development.

While the emphases in Ruether's and Heyward's work are different, both recognize the interrelationship among the oppressions of race, class, sex, nature, and sexual orientation. Both are working toward the transformation of the basic conceptualizations about the natural and cultural spheres. Both are working for the transformation of the actual social structures of domination and oppression.

The foundation of "power in relation" and embodiment to Heyward's theology provides the basis for understanding the interrelationship among the multiple forms of oppression. Evil

exists where there are acts that destroy relation, while good exists with choices to live in love and passion, using power to work for justice. God is known as the "power in relation," the power which seeks to affirm other, nourish other, stand in solidarity with other, befriend other, make love with other. The passion about which Heyward writes affirms authentic selfhood and it empowers people to create right relationship. Passion known through the "power in relation" is distinguished from popular understandings of passion emphasizing overwhelming emotions. Passion, in the sense that Heyward uses it, refers to the willingness and ability "to bear up God in the world."¹³ To be passionate is to be present, engaged, and open. To know passion is to suffer the pain of broken relationship and to know the joy of right relationship. Passion does not lead to broken relationality. Passion exists as people are empowered to use their energies to live in right relationship, work for justice, share joy, and suffer the inevitability of brokenness. Humans are imperfect. Human relationships are imperfect. To live in passion is to fully experience the pain and the joy of deep encounter, of full contact, of empowered selfhood. Fidelity to God, to the call of passionate relationship with human and nonhuman, is based on the belief that God calls people to a just world order in the present and that humans, through their freedom, have the capacity to respond. To recognize human imperfection, to be committed to right relation, is to embody God in the world in passionate living.

¹³ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 54.

The foundation for understanding oppression lies in the self-other dichotomy and the value hierarchies which rise out of it. Ruether contends that the self-other dichotomy became aligned with the good-evil dichotomy at a very early stage of human development. For the oppressor that which is other and different than self is aligned with evil, while goodness resides with that which is like self. From the alignment of difference with evil rises projection, introjection, and exploitation.¹⁴ That which is feared and unwanted of oneself or one's group is projected onto others, those who are perceived as different. The negative images projected onto oppressed groups soon become internalized by the oppressed, while the oppressors grow to believe that their own projected illusions are reality. Exploitation and oppression are explained as acts ridding the world of evil. The distortion of self and other exists at both personal and structural levels (the personal dimensions of the distortions of self and other are discussed in the sub-section entitled Rejection of Domination).

Ruether understands the distortion of human relationship between women and men as establishing a model for the distortion of other human relationships, and relationships between human and nonhuman nature.

A most basic expression of human community, the I-Thou relation as the relationship of men and women, has been distorted throughout all known history into an oppressive relationship that has victimized one-half of the human race and turned the other half into tyrants. The primary

¹⁴ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 162.

alienation and distortion of human relationality is reflected in all dimensions of alienation: from one's self as body, from the other as different from oneself, from nonhuman nature, and from God/ess.¹⁵

Ruether writes about the interrelationship among all forms of oppression as they rise out of sexism. She writes, "The critical feminist principle is the promotion of the full humanity of women."¹⁶ In affirming the full humanity of women Ruether affirms the full humanity of men. Her efforts are focused on a radical inclusiveness of gender, social groups, races, and nonhuman nature.¹⁷

Ruether suggests that conversion from distorted relationships of sexism leads to the transformation of the individual and the community (the individual dimensions of transformation are discussed in the sub-section entitled Rejection of Domination). In keeping with the transformative feminist framework Ruether writes that transformation of the social order includes liberal, radical, and socialist agendas.¹⁸ Structures of oppression are transformed through the development of a democratic socialist society, the dissolution of hierarchies of sex, race, and class, establishing worker ownership of economic means of support, regional development of economic centers, and regional political organization. Ruether suggests that such a society will be rooted in

¹⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 161.

¹⁶ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 19.

¹⁷ While Ruether affirms the full humanity of gay and lesbian persons, and recognizes their oppression among those of race, class, sex, and nature, she does not make heterosexism as central a theme in her work as does Heyward.

¹⁸ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 232.

organic community where childrearing, homemaking, and care of the sick and elderly are valued. All activities are understood to arise from the same source of shared, mutual, organic living, and all are shared by both women and men. Such a transformation supports creative ways of living harmoniously with nonhuman nature. Transformed society is an ecological society.¹⁹ It is a fully integrated society.

Ruether's presentation is aligned with the transformative feminist model. Understanding all oppression to be the result of the disruption of right relationship between men and women Ruether points to dualistic conceptualization, originating in sexism, as the foundation of all oppression. She is also clear about the necessity of changing both consciousness and social structures. Her vision of a transformed and integrated society is consistent with the transformative feminist vision. While Ruether is clear about the interrelationships among the different forms of oppression, as are transformative theorists, their belief that the distorted relationship between man and woman is the model for other relationships of dominance and exploitation does not address the issue in a thoroughly ecological way. Certainly racism and anthropocentrism are central to the early rise of oppression. How did humans first experience difference and assign value? Between themselves and nonhuman nature, between themselves and other groups, between women and men? Perhaps there have been many different firsts all working together, feeding each other in the

¹⁹Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 233.

continuation of dualistic experience and oppressive social relations. Evil is rooted in the distortion of relationship, and the separation into opposites of that which is naturally related. The identification of a single point of entry is counter to the thesis that sexism, racism, classism, anthropocentrism, and heterosexism are inextricably tied together. Through unraveling the knots of one the others are exposed. Practically, people most often begin to experience their wounds, alienation, and complicity in evil from a single vantage point, through their sex, their class, their race, their alienation from nature, or their sexual orientation. But the entry points are multiple and interrelated. A white woman may first come to greater awareness through exploring sexism as it affects her life. Through raised consciousness about sexism she may also become aware of the other ways that she is involved in and affected by oppressive class and race relations. A woman of color may come to understand oppression first in terms of race and later in terms of sex. Or perhaps sex and race are initially related, and it is anthropocentrism that is considered secondarily. The awareness of one will hopefully expand to include awareness of the others. In a truly ecological framework each category of oppression is related.

The Christologies of both Ruether and Heyward focus on Jesus' humanness and his call for the end of oppression. Heyward understands Jesus' love of others as reflective of his love of God. To love others, to work for right relationship among people and right

relationship with nonhuman nature, is to love God.²⁰ In keeping with her emphasis on transformation, Ruether claims that Jesus' power is in his call for the end of the social structures which marginalize and oppress and in the raising up of those who have been violated. Jesus is liberator, redeemed, and redeemer. Through people working for justice in the present, in the spirit of service and mutuality, Christ is embodied and lives in the world now. Liberation from oppression is central to transformative feminism, and it is central to the Christologies of Heyward and Ruether.

Rejection of Domination

As has been stated in earlier sections transformative feminist theorists consider conceptual dualisms to be the root of domination. Dualisms distort the natural, interdependent aspects of existence and lead to the development of value hierarchies. Understanding that domination rises from hierarchical understandings of reality, transformative feminist theorists attempt to reveal the interconnections among all forms of domination. The domination of nature, women, people of color, gay and lesbian people, and poor people, rises out of social structures and policies which are rooted in dualistic conceptual categories. At the same time, oppressive social structures support the maintenance of dualistic categories. Each works to maintain the other.

In Gestalt there is not a great awareness of domination as it is formulated by transformative feminist theorists, while there is

²⁰ Heyward, "Liberating the Body," 143. While most of Heyward's work speaks to loving and transformed relationships among humans, she also speaks to right relationship with nonhumans.

great awareness of the ways that people develop dysfunctional patterns of living because of ways they are discouraged from trusting their own self-regulatory processes. There is little written about the structural aspects of domination or about the interrelationship among the different forms of domination of race, class, sex, nature, and sexual orientation. While consciousness of the structural aspects of domination is meager, the Gestalt understanding of the processes of introjection and projection can be interpreted as being closely aligned with the process of domination and submission. Further, the emphasis on dialogue in Gestalt is an emphasis on mutuality, which is counter to domination and submission.

The process of introjection rises out of relationships of dominance/submission. Introjection, swallowing whole that which should be assimilated, digested, or rejected, happens when one person or group of people dominates another. Domination diminishes the possibility for good contact and the opportunity to integrate unclaimed aspects of one's experience. People who are submissive and take in introjects lose the richness of authentic encounter, but more importantly they are moved away from their centeredness in the truth of self-regulation. Through introjection people lose the capacity to trust the natural wisdom of their own systems, and they begin to believe the introjects are true. In projection, the assigning to others what is unclaimed about oneself, people are robbed of the opportunity for fuller integration. One who projects onto others is left partial and without important aspects of their experience. People who carry the projections are dominated by the weight of the

projections which identify them as something they are not. Further, the projections easily become introjects as a person submits to the other person. An example of this process is when a woman becomes the object onto which a man projects that which is unintegrated in himself. The man loses the opportunity for the development of important parts of himself. He remains partial, frightened of his projections, and unable to act with the wisdom of integrated functioning. The woman swallows the introjects, thus losing a sense of centeredness and trust in her self-regulatory processes. The projection/introjection process disrupts good contact and full functioning for both women and men.

The Gestalt emphasis on organic wisdom as a guiding principle for appropriate behavior cannot exist in relations of domination and submission. Organic wisdom assumes the existence of the full integrity of the person/environment field and trust in the self-regulatory processes of the individual. In the process of domination and submission organic wisdom is negated.

The spirit of dialogue and the I-Thou relationship are central to the theory and practice of Gestalt therapy. Neither dialogue or the I-Thou relationship can exist in relationships of domination. The quality of contact of I-Thou is at center mutual and reciprocal. Hycner writes that one of the by-products of an emphasis on dialogue in therapy is full mutuality between client and therapist.²¹ In the working through of many difficult issues and experiences, the therapist always meeting the client as an equal and working for

²¹ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy," 42.

her/his empowerment, the client and therapist arrive at a place of mutuality, the client's capacity for self-regulation restored. Though Hycner believes in the possibility of full mutuality between client and therapist, it is important to remember the power differential that payment and credentials impose as the work of counseling is currently practiced. While full mutuality in the therapeutic relationship may in fact be a possibility, in the sense that it is not exploitative and the therapist works with the hope for the restoration of self-regulation and full mutuality, there must be acknowledgement of the ways that the therapeutic relationship is unique and appropriately asymmetrical. Uniqueness does not suggest a gradation of value nor a differential of power, but acknowledgement of difference. The therapeutic relationship should be rooted in a belief in mutuality and the client is the focus of therapy. The counselor is responsible for the integrity of the process. The central work of therapy is the empowerment of the client, not the equal exchange that often occurs in friendship. The lack of symmetry does not suggest inequality nor an I-It relationship, but a unique balance that exists in the context of dialogue, where the I-Thou encounter is always possible and the client's journey is foremost. The boundaries between therapist and client are far more fluid than is often acknowledged and the power of healing is ultimately shared, for it is the fruit of good contact. The issue of power relations in therapy invites practitioners to reflect on how their counseling expresses the spirit of mutuality in the context of the unique relationship of therapeutic healing.

While Gestalt does not directly speak to the many forms of domination, it does understand the dynamics of personal domination through the projection/introjection process. In valuing the I-Thou relationship, understanding it to be the most authentic and fullest expression of contact, in emphasizing the attitude of dialogue which is accepting and honoring of that which is perceived as other, and in having faith in the organism's organic wisdom, Gestalt is aligned with transformative feminist theory in speaking against domination. The theory and practice of Gestalt will be enhanced with a transformative feminist critique and greater awareness of the structural aspects of domination.

Rejection of domination is at the core of Heyward's and Ruether's theologies as they reject oppression in any form. Both understand the relational nature of oppression and the implications for both the oppressor and oppressed. Both understand the personal and structural nature of domination.

Heyward writes that human selves exist to the extent that people are open to living in passionate relationship and work for justice in the world. The processes and structures of domination destroy right relations, human experience, and love, for both dominating and submissive people.²² Domination destroys the humanity of all who are involved; it destroys passionate relationship; it destroys God in the world.

The human self exists in co-operative relationships of mutuality. To choose such relationships is to claim one's power in

²² Heyward, The Redemption of God, 87.

the world. Choosing "power in relation" is choosing shared power, relational power. Heyward suggests that people do not choose "power in relation" because of fear of power, fear of powerlessness, fear of ambiguity, and fear of the unknown. Fearful living denies self, other, passionate relationship, and God. In choosing the life of passionate relationship people are opened to the complexity and ambiguity of human experience. "Power in relation" represents authentic encounter and a truth that is deeper than any single aspect of existence. Opening to "power in relation," turning away from the evil of domination, claiming one's power, invites people into a depth of experience which exists only with vulnerability, openness, courage and a willingness to look at the truth of living; it is a truth that is not final, pure, or fully known. Living passionately requires people to see how they have dominated and how they have submitted to domination, how they have broken relationship with self, other, and God. Through passion people feel pain whenever there is brokenness and they feel the satisfaction and joy of deep encounter. Passionate living invites people to claim their power in the mystery of living together. Passionate relationships are creative relationships where experience is not polarized or controlled. Creative encounter opens people to change, mystery, and spontaneity.²³ Passionate relationships are healing relations. Heyward's presentation of dunamis as the "raw, spontaneous, unmediated power--which breaks down established roles of control and possession and sets the stage for a new experience of power, as

²³ Heyward, The Redemption of God, 155.

reciprocal" is the power necessary for healing people and healing the earth.²⁴ Jesus' power, the power of dunamis is counter to any act or structure of domination. Healing occurs in relationships where dunamis, raw, creative power lives.

While Heyward's belief that fear prevents people from entering passionate relationship is central, she does not fully address the reality of human limitation, nor does she distinguish between specific fears and generalized anxiety. The reasons for wounding are many. Because of early depravation or current circumstances some people are not able to enter the depth and intensity of relationship to which she points. Wounds may be the result of abusive relationships, exploitative economic conditions, or the violent realities of heterosexism, and racism. In a single lifetime it is very difficult to recover enough to enter into the quality of relationality to which Heyward refers. This does not negate her thesis, but points to the need for the compassionate acknowledgement of the wounds that keep people apart from each other, powerless, and fearful.

How do people begin the journey to passionate relationship when they are virtually paralyzed by fear? How do people begin to learn nonviolence with themselves and each other when they have only known violation? Entering into the mystery of life itself and the truth of ambiguity is necessary. Individuals and groups of people have their own timing, their own safety levels and their own

²⁴ Carter Heyward, "Redefining Power," Our Passion for Justice (1984; reprint, New York: Pilgrim, 1984), 119.

histories which will determine how and when they heal, when and how they open to mystery and ambiguity. Diving into the depth of the sea of mystery may be damaging for some people, while for others who are ready, it is necessary for further healing and deepening of experience.

Differentiating between fears and anxiety that exists because of social and interpersonal violation, and generalized fears and anxiety about mortality and intimacy, is important. For example, a woman who was sexually abused as a child is less trusting of herself and of others than another woman who did not experience the same kind of abuse. Prematurely asking the first woman to step into the quality of living where mystery and ambiguity are valued, where she can explore her fear of intimacy, power, and death, can inflict further damage and expose her to further violation. Small steps of healing will be necessary before her trust is restored enough that she can tolerate greater ambiguity in her life and increased intimacy with other people. Perhaps passionate relationship, healing relationship with her counselor, exists in the mutual recognition of her wounds and her reality. In those first moments of anguish, as she begins to speak the truth of her life, passionate relationship exists to the extent that the counselor is able to meet her in her partiality and her inability to open to ambiguity and mystery. Passionate relationship exists in many forms and on a spectrum of intensity. While the abused woman's ability to enter into passionate relation is minimal, the fullness of her encounter with herself, her life situation, and the counselor is passionate.

Another important consideration is how the brokenness of the perpetrator is addressed. If the violence of broken relationship rises out of fear of passionate relationship, fear of "power in relation," fear of losing control, and fear of power, asking the perpetrator to step into the sea of mystery and ambiguity may only increase the fear. Meeting the perpetrator at the point of his/her ability to look at the violence of his/her acts may be a moment of passionate encounter. Again, small steps of regenerative work will be necessary before people can open to greater uncertainty and mystery, greater openness, and vulnerability. Heyward's thesis is correct, fear does prevent people from knowing themselves, each other, and God. To the extent that life is lived in fear the oppressions which have constricted and broken life continue. To the extent that one never encounters anxiety, depth and mystery are sacrificed. Meeting the fears and the anxiety, meeting the brokenness of generations in the present of one's own life is necessary, and at best difficult. Such deep healing requires more patience, compassion, and delicate skillfulness than Heyward indicates.

Ruether, like Heyward, centers her understanding of good and evil on the disruption of right relationship. The I-Thou relationship, which represents right relationship is destroyed by personal acts and social structures of domination. Ruether's belief that sexism is the first sin from which others grow indicates that conversion from sexism is central to deep transformation (in the prior section the limitation of identifying sexism as the first sin has been discussed). Ruether is aware of the damage done to both the person who

dominates and the person who submits. The humanity of each is diminished and authentic encounter is destroyed. Ruether's belief that the wounds of domination can only be dressed through metanoia speaks to a deep regeneration of selfhood. The transformative processes for women and men are different, as the wounds of each are different.

In speaking about woman's journey out of sexism, her journey to authentic and grounded selfhood, Ruether suggests that a woman may need to temporarily withdraw from the world of men. Because of the deep anger that women begin to touch as they recognize the power of sexism in their lives they may need to experience and express their anger fully apart from men. While withdrawal may be important to the development of authentic selfhood, the transformation of anger into the energy of change happens in relationship. Too often withdrawal drains the energy necessary for nonviolent dialogue or reflective action into cycles where the anger is recirculated well beyond the point of helpfulness. While Ruether makes note of the danger of women getting stuck in their anger, and that the transformed self is a relational self, she does not offer many suggestions as to how anger can be worked with creatively.

Using the Gestalt framework, anger is a feeling that must be experienced in its entirety if it is to have completion and the space made for new gestalt formations. To cut anger off or to disregard it will insure its becoming unfinished business that blocks the natural flow of gestalt formation. Experiencing it in its fullness will naturally lead to the next experience, and the next, and the next. Anger, when really experienced, does not have to separate a woman

from those with whom she is angry. Instead, learning to create a safe place, inner and outer, for the experience of anger can help her to move into the next experience, the next gestalt, and hopefully, appropriate action. Through the experience of real anger, undistracted anger, women can begin to ask men to hear their experience and enter relationship with them through their anger. Men may learn to no longer fear women's anger, needing them to hide or mask it, and women gain integrity of selfhood. Transformative feminist theorists can make an important contribution in helping persons learn how to create a safe space for their anger so that the important energies for regeneration are not blocked or drained off into violence. Transformative anger is contactful anger, contactful with self and contactful with other. Transformative anger leads to appropriate action.

Dolores Williams speaks about the difference in womanist theology which rises from the experience of women of color, and feminist theology which is depicted as a white woman's endeavor.²⁵ One of the differences is the place of men. Unlike white feminists who have known support from the very structures which oppress them, women of color understand that the men in their lives have been oppressed by the same system which oppresses women. Womanist theologians link racism and sexism more thoroughly than does Ruether. According to Williams, the womanist journey is one based on never having known the support of the oppressor. Referring

²⁵ Dolores Williams, "Womanist Theology and Feminist Theology: Shades of Difference in Perspective," King, Morton, Bennett Lecture, School of Theology at Claremont, Calif., 9 Feb. 1989.

to Jesus, Williams speaks about "Mary's little boy" and the relationship between women of color and the men in their lives, "Mary's little boys," who die daily in situations of injustice and oppression. Williams' emphasis that consciousness raising needs to happen within the family is inclusive of men. Williams' womanist insights and ethnic heritage point to the limitation of the white feminist model. While Ruether is clear about the necessity of rejecting domination at every level, and the personal transformation that men and women must undergo in turning toward relationship in God/ess, her understanding of the transformative journey speaks most directly about people who have benefited from the plunder of oppression. A more inclusive portrayal of the journey out of sexism acknowledges the experiences of people of color where racism and sexism are more closely linked.

Ruether's work points to the deeply entrenched patterns of sexism that are part of male and female consciousness, the structural violence that affects everyone, and the different journeys of men and women. The strong relationship between personal and structural violence which she identifies is central to understanding domination, submission and oppression.

Unity in Diversity

Transformative feminist theory asserts that there can be no single overarching feminist theory and no single representative of feminist theory. Instead, the plurality of voices, inclusive of all people, experiences, and concerns must be taken into

consideration.²⁶ Inclusiveness and diversity are valued. Strength is known in united voices together, each offering a unique contribution. The concept of unity in diversity supports an understanding of the earth as an interrelated web of different life forms, functioning together, each valued in its uniqueness, each necessary, and each important to the well-being of the whole.

While there is nothing in Gestalt that directly refers to the concept of unity in diversity, Gestalt's roots in field theory offer a theoretical base from which to understand unity in diversity. The concept of the organism/environment field points to the diverse aspects of the environment functioning as a whole (please see earlier section Human and Nonhuman Nature). Further, the Gestalt concepts of awareness and contact, and the centrality of dialogue and self-regulation to Gestalt theory, support unity in diversity.

Unity in diversity is dependent on the ability to understand the experience of others and a secure sense of self. The inability to understand another person's experience blocks the capacity to accept difference without judgement. What is other is feared and contact with that which is feared is avoided. Dialogue requires that a person fully open to the experience of others while at the same time retaining one's own identity, one's own stance.²⁷ In dialogue both

²⁶ Warren, 18. While Warren writes that the diversity of women's experiences must be affirmed and that oppressed groups must assert for themselves their experiences and concerns, she does not explicitly extend the discussion of diversity to nonhuman nature. Warren does not use the language of "unity in diversity," but points to the centrality of a politics of diversity.

²⁷ Hycner, "Dialogical Gestalt Therapy," 38.

self and other are acknowledged, known, and real. Dialogue is the binder of self and other and is dependent on the differentiation of self and other. Awareness and contact are essential for dialogue. Through awareness and good contact people are able to listen, respond, open to what may otherwise seem odd, different, feared. Opening to dialogue which encompasses feelings, thoughts, and senses, allows for a deep sharing of experience. Dialogue invites "radical listening" and the hearing of the other beyond words.²⁸ The deeper, full-bodied knowledge that helps people deal with fear grows out of such listening. For example, as white women and women of color begin to listen to each other deeply, listen radically, new understanding, new awareness, and good contact will have the opportunity to develop. When people feel well met, fears are assuaged and understanding can grow. In dialogue grows the celebration of difference and the recognition that many voices are more reflective of reality and truth than any few voices. Unity is impossible without a diversity of voices. Unity in diversity is real when there is authentic dialogue.

Authentic dialogue and unity in diversity is dependent on self-regulation. Good contact happens at the contact-boundary, that process which defines both self and other. In dialogue a person will have good contact and clear awareness of inner processes as well as contact with and awareness of the other. As people awaken to each

²⁸ I am grateful to Toshihiro Takami, director of the Asian Rural Institute in Nishinasuno, Japan, for many rich sharings about "radical listening," the power of common-sense, and the Japanese concept of ichi go ichi eh, which means "a once in a lifetime encounter" possible, moment, to moment, to moment.

other, to the earth, and to their authentic selves, unity in diversity is more possible. Dialogue assumes the existence of authentic self, authentic relation and self-regulation.

Heyward's work reflects a belief in unity in diversity and a commitment to pluralism. Her focus on justice in passionate relationship with others is in alignment with unity in diversity. Through justice the concerns and well being of all humans and nonhumans are raised up and valued. Without justice diversity cannot be accepted and unity cannot be known. Inclusiveness and the affirmation of pluralism cuts to the roots of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and anthropocentrism. Recognizing the difficulty of true inclusiveness the writers of the Mud Flower Collective, of which Heyward is a member, write about their belief and commitment to inclusiveness in the project of feminist theology and theological education.

Our ultimate vision and commitment is that there is room for us all, in our wisdom and our foolishness, our candor and our hiddenness, our public lives and our secret places. There is room for our mistakes, our imperfections, our stupidities; room for our alienation, our rage, and even for our prejudices and bigotries--provided we want to unlearn them. There is room for everybody's story and dreams, faith and doubt, history and present/future, as we come to know ourselves in relation to others.²⁹

In the telling and hearing of all the stories people learn appropriate relationship, authentic selfhood, the beauty of diversity, and of the regenerative possibilities of justice. Apart from the stories of

²⁹ The Mud Flower Collective, 151.

other people, apart from good contact, individual identity is partial and the use of power in the world unjust.

While inclusiveness is affirmed, the writers of the Mud Flower Collective state that there is no room for people who refuse to engage in dialogue, who refuse to open to learning and change. They distinguish between being cruel to those who refuse to dialogue and firmly setting limits as to acceptable behavior, the latter being the chosen response. The setting of firm limits can be in the spirit of peaceful confrontation or it can be in the spirit of rejection. How transformative feminist theorists address those who refuse to grow and those who continue to perpetrate evil, is critical if transformative feminist theory is to offer a truly different framework than that which it seeks to transform. A true inclusiveness will retain an openness to someday establishing right relationship with those who are in the present so broken that the possibility of dialogue is virtually nonexistent and the capacity for self-regulation minimal. While setting limits with such people is necessary for the sake of the healing and growth of others, the possibility of the removal of limits must always exist. To do otherwise contributes to a hardening of heart that is not unlike that which feminism seeks to transform.

Like Heyward, the centrality of justice to Ruether's theology supports unity in diversity. Her presentation of God/ess as liberator and harmonizer acknowledges and affirms difference and equivalency. Harmony is dependent on many different voices, not the voices of a few. Ruether's vision of the "renewed community of creation" is one of inclusiveness and the affirmation of difference.

Hierarchies of domination based on oppositional dualisms are replaced by webs of mutual relationship. The strength of such webs are dependent on the integrity of each strand. The unity of a web exists because of the diversity of the strands which make up the whole. As with the web, the strength and truth of the "renewed community of creation" is dependent on the integrity of each strand. Neither nonhuman nature nor any group of people can be excluded from the life of community without the entire community suffering. With regard to humans, it is critical that all groups speak for themselves and that others hear their concerns and respond with the belief that all persons have the right to live in ways that are supportive of their integrity. The integrity of nonhuman nature must also be supported. As thousands of species become extinct every year it is increasingly important that people learn the importance of diversity. Without diversity of human and nonhuman nature there cannot be rich community; there cannot be life.

Ethical Concerns

Transformative feminism asserts that traditional ethical categories of concern must be rethought. Values of care, friendship, reciprocity, diversity, harmony, and trust are affirmed. Non-hierarchical forms of decision making and conflict resolution such as consensus and mediation are supported.

While ethics is not a distinct category in Gestalt, it provides a rich body of material from which to reflect on ethics. The Gestalt understanding of self-regulation, time, awareness, and contact gives rise to an ethic that respects both the individual and community, an ethic that is rooted in good contact and natural responsibility.

Sylvia Fleming Crocker notes that because of the early emphasis on the here-and-now Gestalt has been considered hedonistic.³⁰ In keeping with Crocker's assertion, John L. Swanson notes that Gestalt may seem at odds with any notion of morality because of its emphasis on the danger of the introjection of ideas.³¹ Further, as has been noted in earlier sections, the emphasis on self-support and individualism has grown without a thorough understanding of the organism/environment field. Misunderstanding the radically relational nature of reality has led to the misrepresentation of Gestalt as individualistic, hedonistic, and value free.

Crocker writes that the vision of Gestalt as hedonistic rises from a misinterpretation of the here-and-now emphasis and the centrality of the present to authentic experience. She notes that the center of Gestalt theory is self-regulation which "is not impaired on the here-and-now, nor does it view the human person as a strictly lone agent."³² People are both individual and related and exist in the context of history, with past, present, and future. While actions exist in the present, they rise out of a past and move toward a future. People can reflect on both past and future. Meaningful experience is connected experience. Crocker writes that connected experience is "not beads on a string."³³ Connected experience is

³⁰ Sylvia Fleming Crocker, "Truth and Foolishness In The 'Gestalt Prayer,'" Gestalt Journal 6, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 5.

³¹ John L. Swanson, "The Morality of Conscience and the Morality of the Organism: Valuing from the Gestalt Point of View," Gestalt Journal 3 no. 3 (Fall 1980): 72.

³² Crocker, "Truth and Foolishness in the 'Gestalt Prayer,'" 5.

³³ Crocker, "Truth and Foolishness in the 'Gestalt Prayer,'" 6.

woven. Meaning rises out of the relationship of the foreground and the background, is created, and is always contextual. Meaning cannot exist without participation and is dependent on people taking responsibility for the present of their lives. As people grow into greater authenticity and fuller self-regulation, responses are more natural and more contextually referenced, less exclusively self and other referenced.

Swanson points out that Perls referred to Gestalt as the philosophy of "what is," distinguishing it from the activity of introjection and the morality of "shouldism."³⁴ Swanson notes that while the philosophy of "what is" has been regarded as healthy and the morality of "shouldism" as neurotic, there has been little work directed at the importance of the process of assimilation as it affects the development of values and moral action.

The contact-boundary is central to an understanding of healthy value development in Gestalt.³⁵ The contact-boundary gives rise to both relationship and individuation. At the contact-boundary people assimilate or reject that which is nourishing or toxic. Swanson suggests that "Healthy valuing is making good contact which enables the appropriate assimilation and effective implementation of values."³⁶ The disruption of good contact leads to organismic dysfunction and inappropriate action. For example, a woman is faced

³⁴ Swanson, "The Morality of Conscience," 72.

³⁵ Swanson, "The Morality of Conscience," 73.

³⁶ Swanson, "The Morality of Conscience," 73.

with making a decision about landscaping her desert home. Having good contact with the context of her living situation she knows that water is of concern to the entire area in which she lives. Aware of her desire to create a space of beauty, aware of the limited water resources, and sensitive to the entire region's dependence on the same water, she chooses landscaping materials which preserve the integrity of her particular region and satisfy her need for the co-creation of beauty. Had she not been in good contact with the realities of her region she may have chosen materials that requires more water than the region can support. Had she not been aware of her need to participate in the creation of a beautiful space she may have decided to do nothing at all. Either decision reflects a lack of good contact. Swanson writes about the importance of contact with the environment and with one's own needs.

By maintaining solid contact with the environment we will effectively inhibit ourselves from expressing our impulses in ways that are dangerous, ineffective or inappropriate in the context of the situation in which we find ourselves. And through self-awareness we will not be surprised and overcome by our own expressions of our inner organismic needs.³⁷

In Gestalt theory human needs are very complex and go well beyond the pleasure-pain dichotomy of hedonism, including love, beauty, truth, and meaning.³⁸ When good contact is established the full range of human needs can receive attention and people can engage in those activities support regenerative living.

³⁷ Swanson, "The Morality of Conscience," 77.

³⁸ Swanson, "The Morality of Conscience," 79.

The assimilation of values rises out of the interaction of people with their environment. Assimilated values are not rigid or controlled, but are responsive to the context of real life situations. They rise out of embodied experience of meaningful contact. Assimilated values can change with new life experiences. Swanson writes about the importance of trust to morality.

In order to allow the "morality of the organism" to emerge, there must be an underlying trust in one's own capacities for coping with the now as it comes. With this trust one can be fully present, open to and accepting of one's experience. Without this trust, the individual resorts to blocking his experiencing and the use of manipulation and control.³⁹

Trust in the adequacy of self-regulation and trust in one's capacity to meet life's changes is essential to moral development and natural moral decision making. The freedom and self-confidence necessary for natural moral decision making is dependent on the integrated selfhood, good contact, and awareness.

The Gestalt understanding that natural moral decision making is dependent on contact in the present, awareness, trust, and integrated selfhood, is consistent with the transformative feminist concern about ethics. The values and tools which Warren raises as important to a transformative feminist ethic: friendship, reciprocity, appropriate trust, diversity, consensus decision making, and conflict mediation depend on good contact, awareness, trust in the wisdom of self-regulation, and integration. People who trust in their own processes and trust life's processes are more able to live

³⁹ Swanson, "The Morality of Conscience," 80.

out values which stress collaboration and reciprocity. The emergence of the "morality of the organism" and the living of transformative feminist values are dependent on a basic level of trust and integration which is possible through regenerative experiences of healing. At the same time, the living of transformative feminist values encourage authentic selfhood and organic community. Transformative feminist values are rooted in an understanding of selfhood that incorporates individual and collective dimensions. For example, care, collaboration, and consensus decision making each involve relations of mutuality. The Gestalt concept of the organism/environment field and the emphasis on dialogue are consistent with this understanding. Natural moral decision making is inherent to transformative feminist values.

Heyward and Ruether each support the development of those values and skills raised up by transformative feminism. The growth of values and relational skills which are reflective of non-hierarchical and collaborative structures are central to the theology of each.

Foundational to Heyward's theology of embodiment and "power in relation" are values of love and justice. God is known in the world through loving, through acts of justice, through deep caring for the earth. Heyward does not set love, care, and justice apart from each other, but understands each to be related to the other and necessary for authentic relationship with other people, nonhuman nature, and the holy. Love is known in justice, justice is known in love, and God is known in the living of each. The real, physical sharing of life together is at the center of Heyward's work. Caring and justice are

reflected in embodied acts in the world. To live in love and work for justice is to share food, to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience, to listen deeply to those who cry out in pain, to provide sanctuary, to kiss another's tears of grief, to make love tenderly, to tend a garden, to be a friend, to walk gently and joyfully on the earth.⁴⁰

Heyward does not advocate a loving and caring apart from the earth or an idealism that separates the present and the future. She advocates a loving and caring, an embodied justice that is of the earth and in the present. "Power in relation," expressed through acts for justice and rooted in relations of caring, suggests the existence of a deep caring-justice, a passionate justice that engages the experience of the whole person. Passion strengthens people, reminding them of the power of their unity as they open to creative possibilities of co-operative action for the sake of life. Heyward's emphasis on right relationship, relationship that is not dominating or exploitative, is supportive of transformative feminist values. Transformative feminist values grow from the actual living of right relationship with other people and nonhumans. Transformative feminist values are necessary for the development of right relationship. For example, mutuality exists where there is no threat of domination or concern about submission, and where all parties involved have established a level of trust which allows for sharing and risk taking that does not threaten anyone. At the same time,

⁴⁰ George Fox, The Journal of George Fox, ed. John L. Nickalls (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 263. The idea of walking gently and joyfully on the earth comes from Fox, who wrote that it is through living one's faith among others that one "will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one."

trust grows through experiences of mutuality. One supports the existence of the other. Heyward's understanding of passion, love, and justice, are made real through acts that express transformative feminist values of appropriate trust, care, diversity, friendship, and reciprocity.

Transformative feminist values are at the core of Ruether's understanding of the "renewed community of creation" and the transformation of the conceptual frameworks leading to social relations of domination. Values oriented to consumption, hoarding, and domination give way to values of reciprocity and harmony, and an understanding of natural limitations.⁴¹ The main markers of the "renewed community of creation" are harmony with natural systems, democratic socialism, economic and political decentralization, and the communal sharing of wealth and labor. They grow where deep care, justice, and mutuality are affirmed. The recognition of natural limitations is important to regeneration as limitations point to what is, grounding people in the reality of the flesh. A deep understanding of the natural rhythms of life and death, and the acceptance of personal finitude are important to the development of values which affirm integrated selfhood and organic community. Redeemed life is only possible in the present of existence. In courageously facing the realities of both the personal and collective present, in opening to appropriate relationship with nonhuman nature, and in awakening to death, one can find the opportunity to develop life-affirming, communal, organic, earth-centered, just

⁴¹ Ruether, New Woman New Earth, 205.

values and living structures. The "renewed community of creation" about which Ruether writes represents community rooted in values of reciprocity, love, justice, and harmony. While it is not yet fully formed, the power of its image and the reality of its partial presence are important, for the shape of the future is dependent on both the hopes and the actualities of today.

Appropriate Technology

Transformative feminism questions the current use of technology and the research priorities of modern science. Appropriate technology is that which is employed for the preservation and integrity of the complex processes of life, not the destruction of the earth.

While Gestalt lacks a statement about how modern technologies affect human functioning and the environmental matrix, Gestalt field theory and the fact that Gestalt is modeled on the natural processes of life, support the development of a life-affirming technology. That which damages the integrity of the organism/environment field does not support regenerative living. For example, the use of chemical fertilizers damages the soil in which crops are grown, destroying the nutritional value of food people ingest. While this technology offers what seem to be benefits, in the long run it is destructive to the well-being of people, the soil, animals, and plants. Another example can be found in the development of nuclear energy. While the promise of cheap nuclear energy is attractive, the cost to the earth is immense. In the face of the health problems and deaths caused by leaks and accidents, and the environmental degradation caused by radiation

contamination, the development of nuclear energy sources can only be understood to work counter to the processes of the earth. In a Gestalt framework the background of support is ideally supportive. The development and implementation of technology that degrades the background of support cannot be condoned. More appropriate technology is that which provides support for full and integrated functioning of the individual and the community.

While Heyward does not speak directly to the development of earth affirming technology, the importance of technology that is earth affirming is woven throughout her theology. The technological expression of "power in relation," deep caring-justice, and love, will support and enrich the whole of life. For example, the vast sums of money that are pumped into scientific research and life denying technology are generated by an economic system that is essentially unjust. Funds which go into the development of military strength do not go into the development of adequate housing, accessible medical care, technology that works with natural processes, and research that will help nourish the "banquet of all life." The funds which go into the development of military strength work to destroy justice and passionate relationship. Stated more positively, technology that affirms the integrity of the processes of the earth supports "power in relationship" and deep caring-justice.

Ruether speaks very directly to the issue of technology. Affirming the human capacity for "technological rationality," she suggests that democratization of the decision making process is necessary for the development of technology that is harmonious

with natural systems.⁴² Such development is impossible when a small number of people controlling the vast part of the world's wealth make decisions affecting the rest of the world. Appropriate technology is that which nourishes the lives of all people and preserves the integrity of the earth. The development of appropriate technology is dependent on people understanding the ecology of relationships and their willingness to live in ways that are creative and reciprocal rather than consumptive.

Implications for Pastoral Counseling

Gestalt and the feminist theologies of Ruether and Heyward, as they have been discussed in conjunction with transformative feminist theory, have extensive implications for a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling. The implications include psychological, theological, and ethical dimensions. There are important themes in Gestalt and the work of Ruether and Heyward that are consistent with the transformative feminist framework and agenda. They offer an integrative and contextual understanding of the relationship between human and nonhuman nature, brokenness and healing, the personal and social dimensions of human existence and the holistic functioning of thinking, feeling and sensing. The importance of community to the healing work of pastoral counseling is emphasized in the Gestalt and feminist models discussed. Regenerative healing can only happen in the context of organic community. As the modern, western emphasis on individuality and specialization are transformed and Ruether's vision

⁴² Ruether, New Woman New Earth, 205.

of the "renewed community of creation" is more fully lived, the work of pastoral counseling will reflect theory and practice deeply rooted in organic community.

Holistic Theory and Practice

A non-dualistic theory and practice of pastoral counseling is important to healing people and healing the earth. Self can only be understood in the context of the person/environment field. The slash between person and environment field represents the contactful process and self identity through time. The splits between mind and body, self and other, human and nonhuman, culture and nature, do not exist in a regenerative, earth-centered framework. Recognizing that the thinking, feeling, and sensing aspects of human experience function synchronously, different therapeutic modalities are implemented. They include body work, massage, training in meditation and prayer, dietary counseling, and dialogical psychotherapy. The integration of thinking, feeling, and sensing points to the capacity of humans for regeneration and the experience of full functioning. Such integration suggests an embodied thinking-feeling-sensing, where the capacities of the whole person are engaged in living experience.

A regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling recognizes that the work of therapeutic healing cannot happen in isolation, nor in relationships of inequality. The importance of relationship and the healing capacity that exists when people live and work in communities that reflect values of deep caring- justice, mutuality, reciprocity, and harmony is central to theory and practice.

Attention to intrapsychic and interpersonal processes is not adequate as people cannot be separated from the environmental context. Through an organismic emphasis people are understood to function interdependently and harmoniously with the whole of life. What affects the environment affects the person, what affects the person affects the environment. The environment is important to every aspect of human living, including identity, development, and need satisfaction.

Goals

The goals of a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling are fourfold.

1. To co-create and nourish integrated thinking, feeling and sensing.
2. To co-create and nourish liberated and organic community.
3. To nourish the deepened experience of the holy through enhanced contact and awareness in everyday life.
4. To cultivate natural responsibility to the earth.

Pastoral Identity

A transformed identity of pastoral counseling centers and pastoral counselors is important to the development of a regenerative, earth-centered focus. If pastoral counseling is to have a unique identity from that of social work, psychology and psychiatry, the conceptual models from which pastoral counselors draw must represent integration, liberation, and holism. Pastoral counseling's greatest strength lies in its tradition of faith which is rooted in love and justice. At the center of the work of a regenerative, earth-centered focus is the liberation of people from

dualistic conceptual categories and the transformation of social structures of injustice which oppress human and nonhuman nature.

Personal healing and the growth of liberated, organic community are interdependent. Though pastoral counseling has traditionally emphasized the importance of community the practice of pastoral counseling has often been individualistic and focused on personal healing. The powerful and healing capacity of committed and nourishing community has not been explored thoroughly.

Regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling centers are dynamic places of community life where people gather together for guidance, care, creative collaboration, worship, and healing.

Appropriate pastoral identity resides in the capacity to nourish integrated selfhood, relationships of authentic meeting, mutuality, and organic community. The counselor, having opened to the holy presence known in relationships with others, human and nonhuman, works with others to create the context for opportunities of authentic meeting and experiences leading to deepened integration and empowerment. Pastoral counselors working from a regenerative, earth-centered focus understand themselves as equal with their clients. While counselors have unique skills that are not commonly shared by everyone in the community, these skills do not suggest a hierarchy of value or an unequal distribution of power. These skills ideally serve the client and the community in helping clients to help themselves and each other grow in self-regulation and the fullness of their own power. Again, difference does not denote value or differentials of power. This understanding of pastoral identity invites pastoral counselors to reflect on their

beliefs about ordination, clerical power, and ministry as it rises from community.⁴³

As pastoral counselors become more aware that they are embedded in the earth, they will see the necessity of living and working in places which are respectful of nonhuman nature. Integrity of place affects the integrity of people and all relationships.

Healing People and Healing the Earth

Right relationship between human and nonhuman is central to understanding authentic human selfhood. A regenerative, earth-centered focus is rooted in the belief that people have unique attributes and that humans and nonhumans are co-members of the earth. This understanding expands pastoral concern to the growth of right relationship with nonhuman nature.

Regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling centers are concerned with helping people learn to live lifestyles that are consistent with environmental sustainability and their authentic selves. Believing that the inappropriate consumerism which dominates the lives of people in developed and developing countries works to destroy life satisfaction, ecological integrity, and organic community, efforts are made to help people learn the richness of simplicity in relations, economics, and daily living. Learning to see the connections between eating South American beef and the destruction of the rainforests, driving one's car and the pollution of

⁴³ Rosemary Ruether, Women-Church: Theology and Practice (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 74. Ruether contends that a church free of patriarchy "will require the dismantling of clericalism."

air, the feeling of meaninglessness and affluent isolation, are important to restoring right relations between human and nonhuman nature.

Recognizing that people and the environment cannot be separated, counselors working from a regenerative, earth-centered framework attend to issues of environmental disease and the pain that rises with environmental degradation, dislocation, and rootlessness. The very real healing capacities of good contact with, and awareness of nonhuman nature are recognized when pastoral counselors understand the intimate relationship between humans and nonhumans.

Brokenness

Both the structural aspects of oppression and the dualistic conceptual framework of modern people contribute to personal and environmental brokenness. Neither aspect can be separated from the other. Regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling includes an understanding of the interdependence of the personal and social dimensions of brokenness and healing. The extent of human brokenness is recognized and the partiality that most people experience is accepted without judgement. This is not to say that acts of violence are condoned, but that people are met in a spirit of acceptance of their human limitation and the hope for the restoration of good contact. An end state of cure is not sought. To focus on cure is to suggest that people cannot live fully in the present, that they must be cured before life can be lived. Within a regenerative, earth-centered model change is recognized as a natural life process and that well-being grows from good contact

and awareness in the present of one's existence. Cure is static; good contact is processive. Cure assumes a state of illness, while establishing good contact assumes that people need only to awaken to the reality of their lives in the present moment for the regenerative process to begin. In establishing contact with self and other a space is created for natural processes to work.

The Entwined Roots of Oppression

Understanding the effects of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and anthropocentrism, pastoral counselors working from a regenerative, earth-centered focus are sensitive to issues of domination, power, and oppression. The wounds of brokenness are different for each person. They are different for women of color than white women, different for gay men than lesbian women, different for poor people than wealthy people, different for heterosexual men than bisexual women, different for children than adults. The differences in wounding indicates the ways people are oppressed and their responses to oppression. Pastoral counselors must understand how people may be both violator and violated at the same time. An understanding of the intricacy and depth of violation is important for making decisions about the counseling process.

Pastoral counselors, working with a regenerative, earth-centered focus are aware of the tremendous power of social reality and the structures of oppression. For example, a family comes to therapy because of relational problems between parents and their children. In time it becomes clear that the root of the generational difficulties is with the relationship between the parents. Further

sessions with the family reveal that the father is under tremendous stress because of his job as a maintenance worker in a nuclear energy plant. Because he feels he has few options for employment he stays with his present job, dedicated to providing for his family, all the while fearful for his health and uncertain about the moral quality of his work. The pastoral counselor can choose to only look at the relational dynamics of the couple, or the counselor can include the environmental stress factor of employment in the nuclear industry in evaluation and treatment. The counselor can address gender issues by exploring with the couple why it is that the father feels totally responsible for his family's material needs. Sensitive to the environmental context of the family's life, the counselor can better understand their experience.

Counselors working with a regenerative, earth-centered focus recognize that while their work may focus on helping individual people or families heal, the deep healing of people happens with the deep healing of the earth. The belief that the earth is an organismic whole means that healing is important at every level. What happens to women affects children, what happens to black people in South Africa affects white people in the United States, what happens to the rainforests of Indonesia affects all of life. Suffering is shared, joy is shared, healing is shared. Though a woman may grow tremendously in terms of self-regulation, integrated selfhood and healing the gender wounds which had left her feeling helpless and fearful, she will feel pain with those suffering political and social oppression. She will experience the pain of polluted rivers, poisonous air, acid rain. Her healing is important. That she can feel

the pain of the earth reflects her healing. Her pain will continue so long as the earth is violated. As long as people are oppressed because they choose to love others of their own sex, as long as animals are tortured for the palates of the affluent, as long as women are denigrated, as long as children starve because of the unjust economic and agricultural policies of the developed countries of the world, personal healing will carry with it the pain of the earth.

While the healing of the earth may not be known in a single lifetime, living the whole of one's life as though the earth can heal, orients people to the present and grounds them in their power. Those people who are alive today and those who will be young adults in the next decade have a particular responsibility concerning the earth's healing. The next decades are critical for reversing the progression of ecological devastation. People alive in these decades have the opportunity to participate in healing the wounds of their personal histories and the wounds of humanity. Healing begins when people take deep responsibility. With the pain of healing comes the gift of awareness of one's continuity with human and nonhuman nature. In this awareness are seeds of joy and deep life satisfaction.

The Roots of Oppression--Fear

Fear is at the center of that which prevents people from moving to more integrated selfhood and community. Three of the most debilitating fears are the fear of claiming power, the fear of otherness, and the fear of death. Often all three work together to keep people immobilized.

Recognizing that fear of otherness is central to the maintenance of sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism and anthropocentrism, regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counselors address fear and work toward the integration of that which has been split off from awareness. For example, a married woman of wealth and privilege is very prejudiced against homeless people. Her anger and disdain seems unfounded as she has not had any actual contact with homeless people that would warrant such a response. After talking with her about her own metaphorical experiences of being homeless and her confidence in her ability to survive in the world apart from her husband, it becomes apparent that she has great doubts about her ability to provide for her own needs. Further, she is terrified of being without her home which has been a fortress protecting her from the financial and social realities of the world. Until she became aware of her own fears, negative images were projected onto homeless people and anyone else who stimulated her sense of inadequacy, her sense of powerlessness. Examining the roots of fear will be central to her healing and the healing of her prejudices. As she is more able to accept without judgement the whole of herself, she is more able to accept the experience of others without judgement. As she is more able to accept her own power in the world she does not need to deny the power of others.

With a regenerative, earth-centered focus, pastoral counselors meet death associated fears and anxieties with an attitude that is accepting of mortality, of the organic reality of flesh. Accepting the natural limitations of finitude and the natural cycle of birth-fruition-death-decay-rebirth, counselors focus their energies in the

present. Redemption does not exist beyond this embodied life, but is a possibility in the present as people heal, courageously touch that which they love, and work together for a sustainable world. In looking at death with open eyes people are liberated to the present. Death awareness is integral to regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling as it helps people accept the reality of change and the miracle of life. The awareness that death will eventually claim all, that everything changes, releases people to the present and frees them from the control and fear which prevents fully committed living. With the acceptance of death comes the freedom to live. Further, the acceptance of death aids people in dreaming a future beyond their existence. Not needing to block the awareness of death with belief in the immortality of the soul, people can look into the lives of the next generations and see the import of their own actions in the present. What happens now affects the world's grandchildren, great grandchildren, their children, forward as far as one can imagine. Because people accept the limitations of the flesh, of this earthly existence, they can celebrate the miracle of life. How precious it is to be born, to live and to die. How important is the work at hand.

An effective, regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counselor addresses the role of fear in the development and maintenance of dysfunctional patterns of living and the continuation of oppression. Recognizing that people are limited, that the living carry the brokenness of generations, the development of patience and compassion are essential to the work of regenerative, earth-centered counseling. The tension generated by an attitude of

patience and the urgency of the issues at hand, leads counselors to develop personal qualities of calm, commitment, perseverance, and faith in the natural healing capacity of the larger community working together for the sake of the earth.

Integrated Selfhood and Responsibility

Integrated selfhood is important to the growth of responsibility. Regenerative, earth-centered pastoral work which enhances the development of integrated selfhood supports an ethic of love, justice that grows from deep, embodied care, and dialogue. The integration of thinking, feeling, and sensation leads to a qualitatively different life experience than polarized living. People who are in the process of integration, men and women, have a fuller capacity to meet the issues of living. Not separated from feeling, men are more able to function in every part of their lives in ways which include the affective level of experience. Not separated from their thinking capacities, women are able to participate in what has traditionally been the domain of men, but in qualitatively different ways.

The integration of those aspects of human experience which have been split off from awareness suggests a thinking-feeling-sensing that allows people to act from the experience of their authentic selves; selves who are in relation to the field of their experience. Such actions rise from a fullness of experience. For example, a man may choose to not eat meat because he knows that if Americans alone reduced their consumption of meat by ten percent over twelve million tons of grain could be saved. This same grain could healthfully feed the 60,000,000 people who will starve to

death this year. His decision, while certainly being responsible, is made by focusing on human needs and rights and mathematical calculations which inform his thinking function alone. Another man who more thoroughly integrates thinking, feeling, and sensing makes the decision to not eat animal flesh because he experiences pain with the knowledge of how animals on feed lots are tortured, anger with the knowledge that many thousands of children die of starvation every day, outrage with the knowledge that one-half of the precious water of the United States is used for livestock production, sadness with the knowledge that the diet of the average American is deadly.⁴⁴ He also experiences a feeling of joyful satisfaction while listening to a lecture on the hopes of bioregionalism, working attentively in the vegetable garden, writing an essay on earth sheltered dwellings and cradling his granddaughter in his arms. While the second man's decision is the same as the man who relied on his thinking function alone, to not eat meat, the integration of thinking, feeling, and sensing grounds the decision in a fuller experience and awareness.

The quality of contact inherent to integrated thinking, feeling, and sensing calls forth a fuller responsiveness than does polarized thinking. When feelings and senses are brought into the activity of thoughtful moral decision making, the whole of a person is

⁴⁴ John Robbins, Diet for a New America (Walpole, N.H.: Stillpoint, 1987), 352. Robbins cites the Institute for Food and Development Policy for the starvation figure for children. Frances Moore Lappe, Diet for a Small Planet, 10th Anniversary ed. (1971; reprint, New York: Ballantine, 1982), 69. The figure for water usage comes from Lappe.

engaged.⁴⁵ A person's organic wisdom and the natural economy of self-regulation work toward the healing and support of the individual and the earth.

No one is fully integrated. The cultivation of understanding, patience, compassion, and tolerance for self and others are important as people open to the ongoing process of integration. The violence of the modern world is addressed as people experience transformed awareness, motivation, and behavior. Ecological consciousness, the awareness of one's continuity with the earth, grows from deepened integration. Responsibility to self and other is rooted in integrated selfhood where people know the power of living in the present, in organic relation. Responsible action rises from good contact and awareness. Responsible action is not reactive; it is responsive to what is real, to what is.

Regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling centers implement transformative feminist values. For example, consensus decision making is used for everyday decisions and collaborative models for staff conferences are preferred. Through the living of transformative feminist values counselors grow in their capacity to listen to others, respect differing viewpoints, and open to dialogue.

⁴⁵ Marti Kheel, "The Liberation of Nature: A Circular Affair," Environmental Ethics 7, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 135-149. Kheel emphasizes the importance of unifying reason and feeling in environmental ethics. Using a similar example about the choice of vegetarianism, Kheel notes the importance of fully experiencing the results of our moral decisions. For example, going to a slaughter house will inform a decision differently than only seeing meat neatly packaged at the supermarket.

The Holy

The holy is known in real encounters of living: birthing a child, baking bread to be shared with loved ones, hoeing fields, caring for children, making love, nonviolent acts of protest, burying the dead. The holy is known in caring, nourishing, tending, and working for right relationship so that all of life may thrive. The holy is not apart from the organic living of everyday life, the authentic here-and-now of breathing, touching, tasting, seeing, hearing. Aware relations open people to graceful living, where they are invited to live in fullness and peace. Through authentic encounter people learn peace with self, peace with others, and peace with nonhuman nature. Religious living is nourished as people learn to trust that the holy is not apart from creation, that the processes of creation are the diverse manifestations of the holy. In helping people heal into integrated selfhood, befriending the intellect, the feelings, and the body counselors support the journey to a religious center of living.

A religious life is a life of contact and awareness, of binding together that which has been separated, of responding to the realities of the present. A religious life is a life of real touch, of good contact, of natural responsiveness. To touch is to meet others in their fullness and partiality, to open to others in one's own fullness and brokenness. Such extension and receptivity expresses the spirit of reciprocity and openness to the possibility of graceful living. In sharing, in giving of what is one's own and taking into oneself that which is needed for full living, the holy is affirmed. The spirit of reciprocity shows death and life to be but two aspects of the single reality of change, of the constant exchange of

transforming energies, of the constant rounds of birth-fruiting-death-decay-rebirth. To be touched is to feel the effect of another's presence, to acknowledge and affirm the power of the other, to give of oneself, to participate in the power of change. To be touched is to die to the old and be birthed to the present moment. To touch each other, to touch the earth, is to be touched by the holy.

Place and Reconciliation

A regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling is rooted in place.⁴⁶ Recognizing that self is only an abstraction of the relationship between self and the environment and that the holy is known through real contact in the world, the actual places of human experience become central to healing and the growth of organic community. Edward Relph writes about the significance of place to human experience.

Places are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. . . . Places are not abstractions or concepts, but are directly experienced phenomena of the lived-world and hence are full with meanings with real objects and with ongoing activities. They are important sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centres of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Edward Relph, Place and Placelessness, (London: Pion, 1976); David Seamon, A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter (New York: St. Martin's, 1979). In thinking and writing about "place" I have relied heavily on the work of phenomenological geographers Edward Relph and David Seamon.

⁴⁷ Relph, 141.

Relph writes that the experience of place can exist at any scale, from a continent to a portion of a room. The essential quality of the experience of place is insideness.

Places are whole entities, syntheses of natural and man-made objects, activities and functions, and meanings given by intention. . . . it is the special quality of insideness and the experience of being inside that sets places apart in space.⁴⁸

Insideness refers to a quality of relationship with a particular place. "To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place."⁴⁹ Outsideness is that which lies beyond the boundary of differentiation. Relph notes that while outsideness and insideness seem to be dualisms there is great flexibility.

Insideness can change and is determined by intentions and focus. In gestalt terms, the figure can easily become background and the background can become figural, depending on the focus of attention. Relph identifies four primary experiences of insideness: vicarious insideness, behavioural insideness, empathetic insideness, and existential insideness.⁵⁰ Vicarious insideness suggests the secondhand experience of place. For example, a place that is portrayed through works of literature or visual art gives rise to the experience of vicarious insideness. Behavioural insideness refers to acts of consciously attending to the physical aspects of the

⁴⁸ Relph, 141

⁴⁹ Relph, 49.

⁵⁰ Relph, 52-54.

environment. For example, behavioural insideness may be experienced by looking at the texture of walls, the lines and curves of a building, or the patterns of design in a field of grain. While behavioural insideness is primarily a visual experience, empathetic insideness suggests a "seeing into and appreciating the essential elements of its identity."⁵¹ Empathetic insideness assumes physical presence and "demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols."⁵² A depth and richness of experience that is different than the earlier descriptions is suggested in empathetic insideness. Relph notes that such seeing and experiencing does not happen automatically, but through training oneself to see places and meaning. Finally, existential insideness suggests the deep identity of knowing that one belongs.

The most fundamental form of insideness is that in which a place is experienced without deliberate and selfconscious reflection yet is full with significances. It is the insideness that most people experience when they are at home and in their own town or region, when they know the place and its people and are known and accepted there. Existential insideness characterizes belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept.⁵³

Existential insideness is the deep experience of being at home.

Relph also writes about two categories of outsideness: existential outsideness and objective outsideness. Existential

⁵¹ Relph, 54.

⁵² Relph, 54.

⁵³ Relph, 55.

outsideness is the self-conscious distancing from the activities of place. The particularities of places have little meaning. They are empty, void, lacking in significance. Objective outsideness refers to a way of looking at places as objects or activities. Holding no center of meaningful experience the individual is radically separated from place. In a Gestalt framework, the experiences of outsideness and insideness rise from the processes of contact and awareness as they affect the organism/environment field and figure/ground reversibility.

Both Relph and Seamon use the work of Martin Heidegger in discussing the concept of dwelling.⁵⁴ Heidegger has written that humans no longer know how to dwell. Dwelling speaks to the basic qualities of being alive. To dwell is to be at home in one's existence, to be in harmony with the earth, sky, gods, and self. Dwelling includes respecting, caring for, and preserving one's place and one's community.⁵⁵ Relph writes about the relationship between building and dwelling.

In building which embraces dwelling there is no deliberate or selfconscious attempt to mould space as though it is an object--rather space is moulded, created, and possessed by the very act of building or landscape modification. The result is places which evolve, and have an organic quality, which have what Heidegger calls the character of 'sparing'-the tolerance of something for itself without trying to change it or control it. . . .⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking"; Relph, 17; Seamon, 92.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," 147.

⁵⁶ Relph, 18.

To dwell and build is to live harmoniously and sensitively with natural processes, to live responsibly in continuity with the past and the future of the earth.⁵⁷ Relph writes about the holy as it relates to building and dwelling.

Such spaces and places are full with meaning; they have an order and a sense that can be experienced directly, yet which is infinitely variable.

When the fusion of dwelling and building, of the earth and the sky and the gods and mortals, is total, then geographical space is essentially sacred.⁵⁸

In Gestalt terms, good contact and awareness give rise to the integrated and unmediated experience of place. The holy is revealed through good contact and awareness of the places of experience. To know authentic selfhood in the context of place is to dwell. A deepened sense of place, of being home, of existential insideness, and the holy exist through experiences of building and dwelling. To be present to place allows for the possibility of encountering the holy in the here-and-now. Awakening to place is to find the center of living, to live a religious life, to return home. To fully encounter place in the spread of a maple's limbs, smells of food cooking, through berries of wheat and grape, and the communion of friendship in the winter's sunlight is to know simple meeting.

Human responsibility lies in the cultivation of integrated selfhood and responsive acts of deep caring-justice. Only through the particulars of place can either exist. As people become more

⁵⁷ Seamon, 92.

⁵⁸ Relph, 18.

practical, more aware of the life which flows through everyday meetings, more willing to open to the present, more attentive to a wider concern inclusive of the earth they will know holy presence to be as close as the air which they breathe, the soil under their feet, the child in their arms, the bird flying overhead. Simple meeting in everyday life transforms violence and is at the heart of reconciliation. That which is truly met, truly touched, cannot be held outside of one's concern. Reconciliation is known and the holy is known in meeting the authentic self and organic community, through living responsibly as co-members of the earth. This occurs in the particulars of place.

Summary

Developing an integrated holistic psychology and theology is an important task facing pastoral counseling. Pastoral counseling has a great capacity to address the relationship between healing people and healing the earth. The interdisciplinary nature of pastoral counseling, its deep roots in a tradition of faith which speaks to the centrality of love and justice for redeemed life, and the fact that the profession is relatively young places pastoral counselors in a unique position to speak to the issues of this era in creative ways. A transformative feminist framework is important to the further development of pastoral counseling as it provides a critique of the social structures of domination, a holistic understanding of what it means to be human, and an understanding of the interdependence of the multiple oppressions of sex, race, class, nature, and sexual orientation. Further, it leads to an ethic based on personal integration, mutuality, harmony, deep caring-justice, and

reciprocity. Real places of encounter become central to reconciliation, to knowing authentic selfhood, other people, the earth, and the holy. The psychological theory of Gestalt and the feminist theologies of Carter Heyward and Rosemary Radford Ruether are strongly aligned with transformative feminist concepts and values. Both the strengths and weaknesses of these models, as they apply to the theoretical development of a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling, have been discussed. While pastoral counselors can draw much from transformative feminist theory, pastoral reflection enriches the transformative feminist effort by addressing the theological dimension of existence.

CHAPTER 5

A Regenerative, Earth-Centered Focus in Practice

Introduction

In earlier chapters it was suggested that reconciliation is the pastoral task of the era. Reconciliation with that which has been split off from awareness, reconciliation with other people, and reconciliation with nonhuman nature are critical for both human well-being and the survival of the earth. Reconciliation is deep peacemaking and is dependent on the regeneration of people and the transformation of the social structures of oppression. If the earth is to survive the devastation for which humanity is responsible, it is important to nurture integrated experiences of authentic self. Similarly, social relations will transform as human actions in the world are continuous with the natural processes supportive of ecological and harmonious living. Such experience and action is grounded in good contact and clear awareness. Without good contact and awareness people act out of the illusion of fragmented experience.

One of the primary threads weaving together the healing of people, the transformation of social relations, and the healing of the earth, is place. Through encounters with place, harmonious relationship with the earth, authentic selfhood, and intimacy of

community are deepened, and experience of the holy is enhanced.¹ Place is central to the practical work of regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling, the task of reconciliation, and the growth of organic community.

Seamon, relying on Relph's work, notes that in the past people were born into a region and rarely left that region throughout their entire lives. "At-homeness" was a given.² At-homeness is not a given for people living in developed and developing countries, nor for people who have been forced to flee their homes as refugees. Human beings, to a great extent, are placeless.

People living in industrialized countries, in the name of progress, too easily dismiss the importance of place to their sense of identity and well-being. Channeling feelings of restlessness and anxiety into myriad distractions, the deep need to feel at one with the place in which they live is outside of awareness. In most developed countries of the world people have lost a sense of place, of belonging, of identity that grows from contact with regional landscape, vegetation and animals. Lost is the deep security of knowing that one's ancestors are buried in the ground upon which one

¹ Seamon, 99-120. The concepts of encounter, contact, and awareness are shared by Gestalt and phenomenological geography. Seamon uses these concepts to describe the human experience of place, suggesting that there is an awareness continuum. "Heightened contact," in his model, suggests a movement toward fusion with the environment field. "Heightened contact" is distinguished from the Gestalt understanding of I-Thou moments of contact. I-Thou moments of contact are not depicted by fusion, but by radical encounter, awareness, appropriate boundedness and a fullness of integration. For a more thorough discussion of contact, awareness, and contact-boundaries please refer to Chapter 3.

² Seamon, 90.

walks daily, that the food one eats is of the land where one lives, that one's children will be born into the region of one's own birth. Lost are the qualities of rootedness and familiarity that exist when people create and build their own dwellings in sensitive accord with natural processes and natural limitations. The community gathering place, alive with conversation and news, has given way to commercial establishments which attempt to convey community, but in fact offer fashionable emptiness. People painfully yearn for the experience of real places, real sharing, real contact, real communion.

These yearnings should not be laid to the side because of the necessities of modern living. To do so dismisses four very important aspects of what it means to be human. First, such dismissal is a denial of the body, the embodied reality of human existence. To know place is to know oneself as flesh, to feel the coolness of the night, the dampness of dew, experience the particular smells of a community, hear the bird singing and feel the seasonal changes. The deep knowing that one is of the earth happens through embodied existence-- through actual encounter in the specifics of place.

Second, such dismissal is a denial of the relational nature of living. The experience of place necessitates contact and awareness, which are primary to the development of self and right relationship. To dismiss place is to suggest that people can exist autonomously and unto themselves, apart from the community of the earth. To dismiss place is to remove humans from the context of organic existence and to deny the spirit of reciprocity that makes life

possible. While human relationships are certainly necessary for the survival of people, the places of living are central for human development as they are the very matrix from which human relationships grow. Children know parents, siblings, grandparents and friends. They know these people in real places of their lives. A parent may hold a child, but the earth holds both parent and child. Human community is dependent on the realities of place.

Third, while the experience of place is a present phenomena, place binds people to the past and to the future. Places carry the experiences of lives long dead, human, and nonhuman. Places are the records of vanished landscapes, birthing species, the stories which have brought each person to the present. Places hold in them the possibilities of the future, that which is not yet born. In specific places children will be birthed, food will be grown, love will be known, and the dead will be buried. To deny place is to deny one's continuity with the flow of what has passed and what is yet to come. In awakening to place people come to know themselves in context, attentive to the particulars of color, movement, taste, smell, sound and touch. In awakening to place people learn what it means to be of the earth, to know the holy through all that exists and to know the present in the natural and cultural historical context of the millennia.

Fourth, the experience of place is related to the development of natural responsibility. Relph writes that the places to which people are attached, the places which have meaning, bring with them a sense of responsibility.

The places to which we are most attached are literally fields of care. . . . But to care for a place involves more than having a concern for it that is based on certain past experiences and future expectations--there is also a real responsibility and respect for that place both for itself and for what it is to yourself and to others. There is, in fact, a complete commitment to that place, a commitment that is as profound as any that a person can make. . . .³

The concept of "fields of care" is important to a regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling. If it is in part through the experience of specific places of encounter that people develop care for home, community, town, country, and the earth, helping people to make contact with place is essential to the development of natural responsibility and integrated selfhood.

To the extent that pastoral counseling is concerned with helping people establish appropriate contact with the environment, the development of authentic selfhood, the growth of organic community, and the healing of the earth, it will include place as a central consideration in the creation of space, the planning of educational programs, and the practice of psychotherapy. Woven into every aspect of a center's programs is the hope of learning to dwell.

Implications for Pastoral Counseling

Place and Community

Place is at the center of the growth of community. Without places of dwelling the fragmentation of modern living is encouraged. As pastoral counselors begin to seriously reflect on the role of place

³ Relph, 34.

and the growth of community, it will be important to examine the structural foundations from which they work.

To a large extent pastoral counseling centers function in ways consistent with the greater health care delivery system. Services are rendered for monetary payment, the rate usually established as an hourly fee. People seek counseling: individual, relational or group, and pay for the services of a pastoral counselor through insurance policies or cash. Therapy is usually conducted in relative isolation from the community. For example, a woman may come to a counseling center to work on issues related to early experiences of incest. She works weekly, sometimes bi-weekly, with a trained counselor. She may even participate in a group for incest survivors. While these provide her many possibilities of healing, the therapeutic value inherent in deep sensitivity to place and fuller community participation, are wasted. While community may be important to counseling at a theoretical level, and may in fact be a living part of a center's life, community does not currently have the central role that it does with a regenerative, earth-centered focus. The theoretical discussion in Chapter 4 has far reaching implications for pastoral models of care. If place is a central consideration in healing the individual, in healing the earth, and the growth of community, and if community is central to regenerative healing, pastoral counselors will be sensitive to the specifics of region and community.

What does pastoral counseling look like in the light of Ruether's dream of the redeemed community? There are many ways that a service center sensitive to a regenerative, earth-centered focus may

be built. But there will be several common threads common to all centers. First, recognizing the healing capacity of community, pastoral counseling centers encourage the growth and life of communities through programs which address educational, economic, therapeutic, and worship needs in the context of a regenerative, earth-centered focus. Second, the needs of the community and the specifics of place will give form to the programs. Both place and community work together to define the particulars of a center. Third, the economic base of a counseling center is not counseling alone, but other small businesses which encourage the development of skills and living patterns supportive of a sustainable future and integrated selfhood. Fourth, counselors are understood to have unique skills in helping people in their life journeys. At the same time, every effort is made to encourage the development of self-help skills among community members. While counselors will continue to offer important service and unique insight that is rooted in extensive training, the healing capacity of community is always acknowledged and strengthened.

Practically, such a counseling center may be thought of in terms of a co-operatively owned and managed service dedicated to healing, education and the growth of organic community in the context of place. Rather than pay for hours of counseling, as is currently practiced, people may pay a standard fee to participate in the activities of the counseling center, including therapy, education, worship, retreats, community organization around issues of social

justice, and small business opportunities.⁴ Such a design will change the work of pastoral counseling from a traditional model of health care delivery to one more consistent with the values of a regenerative, earth-centered focus that knows community and place to be at the heart of harmonious living.

Co-Creation of Space

The physical space of a counseling center is important to the work of counseling. What do the physical realities of counseling centers and offices communicate? Do they suggest human continuity with nonhuman nature and a deep sense of at-homeness? Do they support people in a sensual and richly textured environment? Are they created in harmony with the natural processes of life? Are they ecologically sustainable? Are they places of dwelling? These are some of the concerns of counselors with a regenerative, earth-centered focus.

There are four main considerations in creating a center that can help people awaken to a sense of place. First, regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling centers are environmentally sustainable. Recognizing the enormous strain petroleum based fuel production puts on the earth, regenerative, earth-centered centers utilize renewable energy sources as much as possible, not relying on the energy industry to supply their needs. Centers are located in easily accessible areas, thus decreasing the need for transportation over long distances. Further, all aspects of environmental impact

⁴ Ruether, Women-Church, 89. Ruether notes that a full community will include liturgical creators, teachers, administrators, community organizers, and spiritual counselors.

are considered. For example, styrofoam drinking cups are not used because they are not bio-degradable, petroleum is necessary for their production, and they are not recycled. As pastoral counselors become sensitized to how they can live in more environmentally sound ways, their work spaces will model environmental sustainability. Such concern and attention communicates to the community and to clients a center's respect for life and its commitment to the regeneration of the earth.

Second, centers are created to use both indoor and outdoor space. Realizing that contacting nonhuman nature in appropriate ways is integral to the healing of people and discovering place, pastoral counselors working from a regenerative, earth-centered framework do not limit counseling sessions to their offices. Gardens to walk and sit in, access to parks or nearby hills are considered when designing or choosing a site for a counseling center. As people open to the larger holding of nonhuman nature, trust the natural flow of reciprocal support, and become more at ease with the physical reality of their world and of their bodies, their experience of place will expand and deepen. For example, walking in a community cemetery can open conversations about death, life meaning, familial affiliation and continuity with nonhuman nature. Mindfully walking with feet upon the ground where others are physically buried, feeling the breeze blow across one's face and hearing the crows flying overhead, offers a qualitatively different experience than talking about death in an office separated from the greater context of nonhuman nature.

Third, centers are designed to enrich a person's sensual experience of the world. Color, light, and texture are used to create spaces of beauty that invite people to experience aspects of themselves and their surroundings that may otherwise be neglected. For example, the use of original artwork rich in meaning and beauty, may open a person to experiences which would have been dormant if walls had been hung with pieces that were lacking in imagination and creativity. Work spaces become places of encounter when they reflect the natural/cultural world in ways that are authentic.

Finally, and probably most importantly, a center will reflect the needs of the individual and the community. Recognizing that individual healing is dependent on the growth of organic community, pastoral counselors and community members work together as co-creators of authentic places of living. Community members participate in the actual planning, building and maintenance of a center's facilities.

Community Garden

The community garden project is an important program. Working in conjunction with local churches, pastoral counseling centers work to transform empty lots, lawns, and yards into nourishing, regenerative gardens. Through such a program people are involved in the planning, cultivation, sales, distribution, and sharing of food that is grown in gardens. In actually working together in the garden, community is nourished, individual skills are learned, appropriate contact with the earth is enhanced, food and income is produced, and people are given the opportunity to learn about the regenerative processes of life. Such projects model for the larger region the rich

possibilities of community, commitment to the task of healing the earth, and use of appropriate technologies that work with, rather than against, natural processes. For example, one of the important reasons soils are depleted is because of the modern reliance on chemical fertilization and erosion. One of the primary components of the weekly trash that is taken to the landfills, which are now filled beyond capacity, are grass clippings, leaves, and prunings from plants. The rich organic matter that should be returned to the soil is wasted, while money is spent to dispose of trash, and to purchase chemical fertilizers. Common sense indicates that the organic materials which are taken to the dump should be put back into the soil. But what in fact happens to the weekly clippings of most church lawns? What happens to the weekly clippings of most homes? They are put into plastic containers and hauled away. Composting and recycling is by no means a new idea; it is an idea that has not been widely implemented. Hopefully, people will begin to make changes in their homes and neighborhoods as they become more familiar with the efficient, low tech, common sense activities of a center's garden project.

Gardening helps people learn place and inner stillness. Through gardening people grow sensitive to the natural cycles of a region: rainfall, sunlight, soil quality, wind, temperature, and changing weather patterns. Tending to the needs of plants helps to establish good contact and full awareness with one's region. If people are really aware of a garden, really aware of the needs of plants, they are in good contact. The recognition that a plant is shriveled, that a tomato is ripe, that the limbs of a plum tree are heavy with fruit

asks for a response, asks for active attention. Good contact with and awareness of the garden reflects a "field of care" that is particular and yet inclusive of the larger community, inclusive of the reality of overburdened landfills, precious water, and depleted soils. Attentive gardening invites people to quiet, that they may deeply experience the miracle of life that moves through all that is expressed in the particular place of the garden. Attentive gardening invites experiences of integrated thinking, feeling, and sensing as people open to the experience of planting just this lettuce, pruning just this raspberry, watering just this radish. In learning stillness and attentiveness, the soil is prepared for the fruit of simple meeting.

The Body

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address the intricate functioning of the dimensions of spirit, mind, and body, it is important to emphasize that people function as whole organisms.⁵ Only in abstraction can spirit, mind, and body be separated. Body awareness is important to counseling relative to four main areas: integration of the whole person, environmental disease, holistic change, and the relationship between self-care and caring for others.

First, recognizing the fragmenting force of the spirit/body dualism on modern consciousness, and the effects it has on human experience and social relations, a regenerative, earth-centered focus incorporates therapeutic body work as an important component

⁵ Ernest Rossi, The Psychobiology of Mind-Body Healing: New Concepts of Therapeutic Hypnosis (New York: Norton, 1986).

in an effort to heal the split of spirit/body. Integrative body work, therapeutic massage, exercise, dietary counseling, and meditative disciplines which help calm the mind and body, and integrate the whole person, are important components of an overall program of care. Integrated selfhood, self-regulation, and enhanced awareness of the earth are dependent on body awareness. Without awareness of the body, people are not able to understand their needs, nor are the contact-boundaries of experience good. Through enhanced awareness of the body, balance, harmony, and deepened life experience are enhanced.

Second, the very real environmental diseases from which record numbers of people suffer, and the stress related diseases which debilitate the immune system, altering emotional and cognitive functioning, must be considered in counseling. For example, working with a person who suffers from depression because of her or his life situation is important, yet partial, when the delicate relationship between emotions and the immune system is understood. While talk therapy can be an important component in working with depression, the role of the immune system must also be considered relative to etiology and treatment.

Third, insight alone is not enough for authentic change. The Gestalt emphasis on the engagement of the whole person, inclusive of the body and senses, underscores the importance of the body in healing and integration. Methods which enhance physical, as well as intellectual and emotional experiences of learning, should be included in therapy. For example, a couple may report increasing distance in their relationship. They are quite articulate about the

ways and reasons for their drifting apart. Yet, it is not until they physically portray their distance and communicate across the chasm of their separation through body postures, that they are able to feel the pain of their unwanted separation. In fully experiencing the pain of the separation, they complete a full gestalt and move into new patterns leading to new alternatives, and possibilities of increased closeness. Though they knew the reasons for their separation cognitively, physically acting it out led to a fuller and more complete gestalt, which, in turn, led to a new gestalt and new possibilities. Recognition and attention to body-knowledge is central to deep regeneration.

Finally, one of the central issues of body awareness in therapy is the discernment of needs and the learning of self-care. With a regenerative, earth-centered focus, there is a recognition of the relationship between self-care and care for others. In the fast paced age of chemically produced foods, high stress, spectator sports, fashion, and chemical and alcohol addiction, the natural needs of the body go unattended. The relationship between lifestyle and environmental degradation goes virtually unnoticed. For example, what and how people eat affects the quality of their life experience, as well as having global ethical implications. Earle P. Barron writes about the relationship between spirituality and different foods.⁶ Spirituality affects the whole person, in every aspect of life. Barron notes that the kinds of foods eaten, the

⁶ Earle P. Barron, "Food for Spirituality," Journal of Pastoral Care 43, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 131-140.

overall quality of a person's physical health, and the environment in which food is taken into the body will, influence spiritual experience. Barron suggests that the eating of food should be understood as a sacrament and the experience of God's graceful presence. In agreement with Barron, counselors working from a regenerative, earth-centered focus believe the holy is known in all places of authentic meeting, including the eating of food. To eat food with awareness is to eat food sacramentally.

The ethical implications of diet are vast. In the United States diets are high in fat and sugar.⁷ Both are unhealthful, affecting the functioning of the body in many adverse ways. For example, it is widely known that the consumption of large amounts of saturated fats, of which animal flesh is a primary source, is directly related to heart disease. The cost of caring for persons with heart disease drains funds that could otherwise be allocated to preventive health programs such as prenatal care, dietary counseling, and global vaccination. The injustices generated by such a relationship to food damage everyone: the people who eat high fat diets, and the people who do not receive adequate health care because of lack of funding. Further, diets which include animal flesh contribute to the cruelty to animals. Tremendous pain is inflicted on animals before they appear as meat on the plate. They are crowded together, stored in cages, filled with hormones, force fed, and slaughtered without concern for their experience.⁸ The vast amounts of grain that are

⁷ Robbins; Francis Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins, World Hunger: Twelve Myths (New York: Grove, 1986).

⁸ Robbins.

needed to feed livestock can be more efficiently used to feed people. The waste of precious grains in livestock production, and the damage to the environment in terms of water usage, water pollution, and timber cutting, is enormous. These considerations together raise the question of whether or not eating the flesh of animals raised in captivity can be a healthful, a moral, or a religious act. To be aware of one's needs, to be in good contact with, and have full awareness of others, human and nonhuman, affects diet. A healthful diet is one that is environmentally sustainable, nutritious, respectful of the lives of animals, and just with regard to other persons in the world. Eating simple grains, fruits, and vegetables, in awareness and good contact, knowing that all have food enough to eat, that animals are not tortured, is to eat healthfully and responsibly-- it is to eat in grace.⁹

Recognizing the importance of diet, counselors with a regenerative, earth-centered focus address this concern in individual counseling sessions, educational programs, and through community involvement in local food production and sales. Frequent and regular community meals are taken together in a spirit of gratefulness for all the lives that have been given and all the labor that have brought food to the table.

⁹ This is not to say that the flesh of animals can never be consumed responsibly, but that current practices of livestock production and slaughter are very problematic. If one is able to have a more direct relationship with the animals that one eats, raising them, treating them kindly, hunting them fairly, slaughtering them in ways that respect their experience, and expressing gratefulness for their lives, eating meat becomes less problematic with regard to animal torture.

Attending to the needs and the language of the body is very important for pastoral counselors who believe in holistic functioning. Hoping to address the spirit/body split, and recognizing the holiness of this earthly life, the body, as a source of wisdom, is respected, listened to, and cared for throughout a center's programs.

Addressing Fear

The wounds of disrupted contact and unawareness are glaringly evident in family conflict and individual dysfunction. The focus of both individual and relationship counseling is the establishment of good contact, full awareness, and integrated selfhood. Reconciled relationships among people are dependent on the extended capacity for good contact, full awareness, and the growth of integrated selfhood. In turn, reconciled relationships nourish such growth. Both work together. In Chapter 4, it was noted that three of the most debilitating fears, the fear of death, the fear of otherness, and the fear of power, prevent good contact, clear awareness, and integrated selfhood. Addressing these three fears by supporting the development of integrated experience and the growth of nourishing community, is central to the work of regenerative, earth-centered counseling.

The fear of claiming power and the fear of otherness is addressed through the growth of self-regulation and the growth of organic community. As trust in the capacity to adequately meet life's challenges grows, the willingness to claim power and engage that which is other grows as well. Therapeutically, that which has been split from awareness is contacted and reclaimed in the context of an accepting, confirming, dialogical relationship. In the

therapeutic relationship and the learning situations which are provided through other counseling programs, appropriate boundaries are supported and contact is enhanced. The techniques of therapy, while consistent with regenerative, earth-centered values, are not as important as the quality of dialogue that exists between the counselor and client and the quality of community life that is shared. The material for therapy is life experience. Abstraction and theorizing are minimized, while staying in the lived present is emphasized.

Because both women and men have been socially conditioned with regard to gender, contact, awareness, and boundaries are each affected. Counselors are especially sensitive to the issues and dysfunctions that are rooted in gender and sexism. This is also true for racism, classism, heterosexism, and anthropocentrism. Establishing the contextual reality for dysfunction is important for both understanding and healing. For example, a woman may come to therapy because of the onset of depression with the end of an intimate relationship. Recognizing that there is a great deal of research suggesting that women are more relationally identified because of socialization patterns, her depression is seen as appropriate.¹⁰ Her self-identity has been intimately linked to her relationships. While counselors who are not aware of the importance of relationship to self-identity might treat the depression as a problem of confluence, the awareness of a woman's relational identity leads to an attitude more respectful of the

¹⁰ Miller.

depression and the woman's life experience. The contextual understanding of life experiences, as they are worked with in therapy, is critical.

Death awareness is important in individual and group therapy. A regenerative, earth-centered approach in counseling recognizes death as a natural aspect of life. Hoping to encourage openness to death as a natural process, counselors work with death in terms of change. For example, a woman who has devoted much of her adult life to raising her children begins to feel the passage of time in ways that leave her feeling fragile, mortal, and fearful when her adult children leave home. While focusing on her new identity as a mother with grown children and her aspirations for the next stage of life is important, her life situation also presents rich opportunities to talk about death and the ultimate transience of all that exists. In speaking to this aspect of her life transition, there is the possibility for deepened experience and recognition of the interdependence of life and death. Her fragility is that which can lead her to a fuller experience of life. Because the counseling center has a garden project and uses both indoors and outdoors, there are many opportunities to experience and talk about the natural, regenerative cycles of living and dying. She has the possibility of experiencing the changing nature of her own life cycle in the larger cycles of the living and dying of the earth. Hopefully, fear gives way to deep understanding, trust, and increased energy in the present. Through death awareness people may come to see mortality not as an evil, but a natural life process.

Recalling places of significance and security can be an important part of individual therapy and working with fears. Michael Godkin writes that experiences of rootedness and uprootedness are important to therapeutic work.¹¹ Through working with memories of place, people can recall positive experiences of self that were deeply associated with a sense of place.

Interviews . . . allow a client to rediscover and re-examine a forgotten sense of coherence and identity which was originally a part of experience in places associated with positive memories. Such places are those in which self-identity was originally anchored and to which an individual feels a sense of belonging or rootedness.¹²

Godkin suggests that the recollection of place is especially important to the extent that it helps a person experience a "coherent sense of self."¹³

In Gestalt terms, integrated experience exists in the context of the organism/environment field. Experiences of belonging, existential insideness, good contact, and awareness, rise from the processes of the person and the environmental field. Through experiences in real places, people know both self and other, safety and fear, rootedness and uprootedness. For example, while working with a woman who experiences great fragility and little sense of her own power, a counselor invites her to recall her earliest memories

¹¹ Michael A. Godkin, "Identity and Place: Clinical Applications Based on Notions of Rootedness and Uprootedness," The Human Experience of Space and Place, eds., Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (New York: St. Martin's, 1980), 73-85.

¹² Godkin, 80.

¹³ Godkin, 81.

of feeling strong, powerful, and grounded, and the places that were especially important to her during those times. She begins to search back through the years of her life and recalls a time when she was nine or ten years old. There was a great deal of stress in her family. To escape, she spent a lot of time in a tree-house that she and her friends had built together. In talking with the counselor she recalls many of the particulars of her tree-house: feelings of competency in building a sanctuary for herself, the actual physical sensations of being held up by the tree, the safety she always knew high in the branches, and the sense of community and belonging she had with her friends during that time of her life. Remembering the particulars of the tree-place proved to be important as the woman met her fears and grew into a fuller capacity for self-regulation and a deepened sense of the holy active throughout her life. Therapeutically, place can play an important role in the integrative work of the whole person.

Denial and Despair

Living in an era of unprecedented suffering, possible nuclear destruction, and threatened ecological collapse, easily leads to feelings of anxiety and despair. Macy has effectively addressed the relationships among anxiety, denial and despair, and the importance of experiencing that which is held outside of awareness. In the service of empowerment and effective action, she encourages people to open to their experiences of pain, anxiety, and despair.¹⁴ In Gestalt terms, the denial of the pain and anxiety associated with the

¹⁴ Macy, 1983.

present global crises only leads to the buildup of unfinished business and increasing dysfunction. For a gestalt to complete itself, it must be experienced fully. To block a gestalt assures its continuation in some form. Through contact with their anxiety and pain, people receive back their experience and are opened to new gestalts and new possibilities. Pastoral counselors working from a regenerative, earth-centered framework are aware of the undercurrents of anxiety and pain associated with nuclear and environmental issues.¹⁵ In both individual and group situations people are encouraged to make contact with these experiences. They are provided settings and opportunities to express their grief, their fears, their hopes, and channel their energies into productive action. A complete gestalt, experienced with full awareness, leads to natural, responsible action.

Experiences that engage cognitive, sensual, and feeling aspects of experience in integrative ways are used in both individual and group settings. For example, a center may offer a workshop experience entitled "Healing Ourselves--Healing the Earth".¹⁶ The goals for the group are multiple: to educate about the ecological ruptures that threaten life, to help people contact their experiences of the current ecological crises and the suffering of the earth, to

¹⁵ Jim Smith-Farris and Howard Clinebell, "Pastoral Care In the Nuclear Shadow: What Pastoral Care Specialists Are Doing," Journal of Pastoral Care 40, no. 3 (Sept. 1986): 233-245. This article points to a growing awareness among pastoral counselors of the ways that fears about a nuclear holocaust affect people.

¹⁶ While the development of this group experience is my own, much of the theoretical base, as well as some of the exercises, have been drawn from Macy's work on despair and empowerment, and concepts in Gestalt.

help people understand the relationship between their personal lives and environmental degradation and suffering, to build community, to express feelings, to help people remember experiences of the holy with nonhuman nature, and to create possibilities for effective action. The group experience is designed to span a half-day.

Participants are asked to bring with them something which represents the importance, power, and holiness of the earth. After gathering together in a circle, with an altar area in the center of the group, a candle is lighted. An earthen bowl filled with water and the candle are placed on the altar. The four elements of earth, air, fire, and water are represented.

The facilitator of the group begins by speaking about why the group has gathered, speaking with great feeling about the pain of the earth. After the facilitator speaks about his/her own pain and his/her relationship with the earth, the group is invited into a time of silence. The silence is ended by the facilitator who invites each participant to place his/her chosen object on the altar cloth and share with the group feelings about the plight of the earth. When all have finished speaking, silence is again invited.

Hoping to bring the voices of many who are not present into the room, the facilitator breaks the silence by reading selections of literature which speak to the power, beauty, and the passing of life on earth. Again, silence is invited. Participants are then asked to call forth and share their earliest memories of feeling whole and at one with the earth. After each has shared and there are a few minutes of silence, the bowl of water is passed from person to person, each person blessing those nearby with water on the face.

The blessing acknowledges that each person has known in the past, and knows now, the holiness of the earth--"With this water I bless the child who knew and I bless you, Mary, who know now that the earth is holy. May you be healed. May you know peace." Again, brief silence.

The facilitator then asks the group to share what they have done to change their lives and the social, political, and economic systems which contribute to ecological destruction. Together, ideas about future action are generated. The day ends with the saying of grace and the sharing of bread, juice and dried fruit. The hope of facilitating such a group is that it will help people remember that they are of the earth and empower them to work together to live in ways that are healing.

Economic Conversion

Counselors working from a regenerative, earth-centered framework are sensitive to the exploitative economic realities of the modern world and how these realities affect the development of integrated selfhood and a religious life. In response to this sensitivity, regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling centers, in conjunction with local churches and other groups with like concerns, develop economic programs which address right livelihood, the development of nourishing community and harmonious living with nonhuman nature. In doing this people are encouraged to move from a consumer orientation in living to a creative orientation in living. How one participates in the community, what one can offer in creative work, becomes more important to life satisfaction than consumption. Personal and familial sustainability is dependent on

the sustainability of the earth. Through the development of economic alternatives which are both environmentally sound and economically viable, people gain a security well beyond anything that can be known while participating in work destructive to the earth. Further, the real engagement of the whole person in community organized work offers many opportunities for learning, sharing, and transformation that cannot be as fully present in an individual psychotherapeutic relationship.

For example, a woman comes to counseling with few skills to provide a living for herself and her small children. Through working in a traditional work situation her self-esteem has been damaged and her trust of others virtually extinguished. She chooses to participate in one of the cottage industries sponsored by the counseling center. The people with whom she works are dedicated to providing quality clothing that is affordable, ecologically responsible, and locally made. They work in a collaborative setting where she learns about consensus decision making, conflict resolution through mediation, accounting, production, and marketing. She also develops personal relationship skills and learns about the impact of her work on the environment. As she becomes more committed to the work and her involvement grows, she experiences a deepened level of trust of others and trust in her own skills. She grows in integration and participates in the building of healing community. While psychotherapy has been an important part of her healing, the real living and working in a community of respect, equality, economic viability, and ecological sensitivity, changed her life in important ways. Helping a person create or find an economic

base that is consistent with transformative feminist values is important to healing personal wounds.

Education

Believing that preventive care is central to healing people and healing the earth, regenerative, earth-centered pastoral centers commit energy and resources to educational programs which help people learn about consensus decision making, collaborative work models, and conflict resolution through mediation. There are programs designed to help people awaken to environmental issues and how they can participate in the regeneration of the earth, as well as programs which help people deal with the daily effects of environmental degradation.

Regenerative, earth-centered pastoral counseling centers are places of learning and sharing, places of good contact and awareness. Teaching methods are consistent with the material presented and regenerative, earth-centered values which emphasize dialogue, contact, integration, and trust in self-regulation. In keeping with the regenerative, earth-centered emphasis on place, educational experiences which help people gain a deepened experience of their everyday places of living, are central. Educational experiences which help people grow into a deepened sense of "at-homeness" will focus on present life experiences and creating spaces that enhance dwelling.¹⁷

Seamon provides an outline for organizing an "Environmental Experience Group" that focuses on the everyday experience of

¹⁷ Seamon, 94.

place.¹⁸ Among the many themes explored in the group are: movement, attention, emotions, spatial centers, order, care, and attachments. The goal of the group is to help sensitize individuals to the experience of place. The use of such a group, amended to the specific needs of a particular community, could offer the possibility of rich experiences of dwelling, and enhanced contact and awareness of place.

Because body sensations are central to the experience of place, the development of programs which help people learn to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell the particulars of place can contribute to a feeling of wholeness, well-being, and dwelling.¹⁹ Becoming aware of one's surroundings can happen at many levels, from basic observation, to the experience of existential insideness which Relphe describes. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the many ways of developing deepened experiences of the senses, the many paths include: breath awareness, dance, body-movement, massage, and meditation. In helping people awaken to their senses, of making meaningful contact, they are helped to awaken to the holy in everyday life.

Worship, Ritual, and Celebration

With a regenerative, earth-centered focus in practice, counselors, in collaboration with the community and individual clients, incorporate into their work ritual and celebration that is

¹⁸ Seamon, 201.

¹⁹ Seamon, 124. Seamon writes about the importance of learning to see in new ways. Encountering the world authentically is dependent on the direct experience of the senses.

sensitive to the natural processes of the earth. Ritual and celebration that helps to bind together the fragmented processes of the self, human and nonhuman nature, and self and other, develops out of the particulars of place, the needs of the community, and the creative energies flowing in the present.

One of the center's programs includes a retreat space that offers people the opportunity to live in earth-centered community for extended periods of time. Some members of the community may choose to live full-time at the retreat space which is in close physical proximity to the rest of the counseling center. In the spirit of collaboration, the members of the whole community, residential and non-residential, create places and possibilities for worship, celebration, and ritual.

Individual and relational processes are deepened as counselors and clients look to the possibilities that exist in healing contact with the earth. For example, a man who has expended tremendous energy living and working in a fast paced, urban environment finds himself numb to others, his own feelings, and the world around him. He has lost his experience. Virtually cut off from any sense of natural rhythm, the holy, self-regulation and contact with nonhuman nature, he decides to make a one-month retreat to a center's retreat community which is committed to simple living, responsiveness to the earth's natural cycles, love, and deep caring-justice. In his retreat he participates in the mindful preparation of food with others in the community, long walks at a pace that allows him to synchronize his breath with his step, study groups that are focused on issues of peace, justice, and sustainability, and daily

celebrations of the gifts of life and community. His pace slows, his awareness grows, his living experience deepens, and his sense of the holy is renewed. Earth-centered ritual and celebration that grows out of community, out of authentic relations among humans with each other and nonhuman nature, out of the particulars of place, liberates and empowers people to live in ways that affirm the holy in all of life.

Summary

A regenerative, earth-centered focus in pastoral counseling works for the enhancement of contact and awareness. Without contact and awareness people are removed from the realities of living as mortal beings; they lose their experience, and they are removed from the effects of their choices. Through good contact and awareness grows an integration of sensing, feeling, and thinking in natural, moral decision making, and the living of everyday life. The concept of place, as it is used in the field of phenomenological geography, is an important thread binding together the healing of people and the healing of the earth. Place points to the powerful relations of people in real regions of encounter. Individual integrity, natural responsibility, organic community, and experiences of the holy exist through intimacy with place. Pastoral counseling centers which are sensitive to the earth implement programs of economic conversion and offer creative possibilities for sustainable, regenerative, religious living.

Personal Reflections

During the writing of this dissertation hundreds of species have been added to the endangered list, countless people have died of

starvation, millions of dollars have been spent on psychotherapy, vast amounts of the world's resources have been funnelled into defense, and the deterioration of the immune systems of many species worsens. The injustices and suffering that the earth endures exist because we humans of the earth do not know who we are in relation to the rest of the community and we have forgotten what it means to be embodied creatures.

New social and environmental programs aimed at restoration and conservation offer important, but temporary, solutions. Counseling which recognizes the intrapsychic and interpersonal dimensions of humanness is important, yet partial. Living which ignores the wisdom of the body may be efficient in the short term, but it is deadly and without passion. Our long-term healing and the long-term healing of the earth will come as we awaken to the reality of our continuity with nonhuman nature, welcome the realities of flesh, and find courage to live in ways that are supportive of the whole of life. Human consciousness and social relations must change. Deep healing will come as we weave together that which has been torn apart, as we open to our experience and work together to create a whole, sustainable, and beautiful earth.

While the heaviness of the issues may leave us feeling weighted down, the work of regeneration is essentially joyful. In finding our authentic selves and re-mem-bering what it means to live in touch with the earth, we will find that the heartbeat of the universe beats in us all, that our loving leads us to the holy, and that there is forgiveness. The heartbeat awaits. The choices are ours. The time

is now. May we listen deeply and act with the wisdom of our whole selves.

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